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C R GRANT

CAN YOU FORGIVE HER

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

VOLUME II.

North Central College Library
Naperville, Illinois

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CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?

CHAPTER I.

THE PRIORY RUINS.

Lady Midlothian went away on her road to London on the Wednesday morning, and Alice was to follow her on the next day. It was now December, and the weather was very clear and frosty, but at night there was bright moonlight. On this special night the moon would be full, and Lady Glencora had declared that she and Alice would go out amidst the ruins. It was no secret engagement, having been canvassed in public, and having been met with considerable discouragement by some of the party. Mr. Palliser had remarked that the night air would be very cold, and Mr. Bott had suggested all manner of evil consequences. Had Mr. Palliser alone objected, Lady Glencora might have given way, but Mr. Bott's word riveted her purpose.

"We are not going to be frightened," Lady Glencora said.

"People do not generally walk out at night in December," Mr. Palliser observed.

"That 's just the reason why we want to do it," said Lady Glencora. "But we shall wrap ourselves

up, and nobody need be afraid. Jeffrey, we shall expect you to stand sentinel at the old gate, and guard us from the ghosts."

Jeffrey Palliser, bargaining that he might be allowed a cigar, promised that he would do as he was bidden.

The party at Matching Priory had by this time become very small. There were indeed no guests left, not counting those of the Palliser family, excepting Miss Vavasor, Mr. Bott, and an old lady who had been a great friend of Mr. Palliser's mother. It was past ten in the evening when Lady Glencora declared that the time had arrived for them to carry out their purpose. She invited the two Miss Pallisers to join her, but they declined, urging their fear of the night air, and showing by their manner that they thought the proposition a very imprudent one. Mr. Bott offered to accompany them, but Lady Glencora declined his attendance very stoutly.

"No, indeed, Mr. Bott; you were one of those who preached a sermon against my dissipation in the morning, and I 'm not going to allow you to join it, now the time for its enjoyment has come."

"My dear Lady Glencora, if I were you, indeed I would n't," said the old lady, looking round towards Mr. Palliser.

"My dear Mrs. Marsham, if you were me, indeed you would," and Lady Glencora also looked at her husband.

"I think it a foolish thing to do," said Mr. Palliser, sternly.

"If you forbid it, of course we won't go," said Lady Glencora.

"Forbid it!—no; I shall not forbid it."

"Allons donc," said Lady Glencora.

She and Alice were already muffled in cloaks and thick shawls, and Alice now followed her out of the room. There was a door which opened from the billiard-room out on to the grand terrace, which ran in front of the house, and here they found Jeffrey Palliser already armed with his cigar. Alice, to tell the truth, would much have preferred to abandon the expedition, but she had felt that it would be cowardly in her to desert Lady Glencora. There had not arisen any very close intimacy between her and Mr. Palliser, but she entertained a certain feeling that Mr. Palliser trusted her, and liked her to be with his wife. She would have wished to justify this supposed confidence, and was almost sure that Mr. Palliser expected her to do so in this instance. She did say a word or two to her cousin upstairs, urging that perhaps her husband would not like it.

"Let him say so plainly," said Lady Glencora, "and I 'll give it up instantly. But I 'm not going to be lectured out of my purposes second-hand by Mr. Bott or old Mother Marsham. I understand all these people, my dear. And if you throw me over, Alice, I 'll never forgive you," Lady Glencora added.

After this Alice resolved that she would not throw her friend over. She was afraid to do so. But she was also becoming a little afraid of her friend,—afraid that she would be driven some day either to throw her over, or to say words to her that would be very unpalatable.

"Now, Jeffrey," said Lady Glencora, as they walked abreast along the broad terrace towards the ruins, "when we get under the old gateway you must let me

and Alice go round the dormitory and the chapel alone. Then we'll come back by the cloisters, and we 'll take another turn outside with you. The outside is the finest by this light,—only I want to show Alice something by ourselves."

"You 're not afraid, I know, and if Miss Vavasor is not——"

"Miss Vavasor,—who, I think, would have allowed you to call her by her other name on such an occasion as this,—is never afraid."

"Glencora, how dare you say so?" said Alice. "I really think we had better go back."

She felt herself to be very angry with her cousin. She almost began to fear that she had mistaken her, and had thought better of her than she had deserved. What she had now said struck Alice as being vulgar, —as being premeditated vulgarity, and her annoyance was excessive. Of course Mr. Palliser would think that she was a consenting party to the proposition made to him.

"Go back!" said Glencora. "No, indeed. We 'll go on, and leave him here. Then he can call nobody anything. Don't be angry with me," she said, as soon as they were out of hearing. "The truth is this;—if you choose to have him for your husband, you may."

"But I do not choose."

"Then there can be no harm done, and I will tell him so. But, Alice,—think of this. Whom will you meet that would suit you better? And you need not decide now. You need not say a word, but leave me to tell him, that if it is to be thought of at all, it cannot be thought of till he meets you in London. Trust me you will be safe with me."

"You shall tell him nothing of the kind," said Alice. "I believe you to be joking throughout, and I think the joke is a bad one."

"No; there you wrong me. Indeed I am not joking. I know that in what I am saying I am telling you the simple truth. He has said enough to me to justify me in saying so. Alice, think of it all. It would reconcile me to much, and it would be something to be the mother of the future Duke of Omnium."

"To me it would be nothing," said Alice; "less than nothing. I mean to say that the temptation is one so easily resisted that it acts in the other way. Don't say anything more about it, Glencora."

"If you don't wish it, I will not."

"No;—I do not wish it. I don't think I ever saw moonlight so bright as this. Look at the lines of that window against the light. They are clearer than you ever see them in the day."

They were now standing just within the gateway of the old cruciform chapel, having entered the transept from a ruined passage which was supposed to have connected the church with the dormitory. The church was altogether roofless, but the entire walls were standing. The small clerestory windows of the nave were perfect, and the large windows of the two transepts and of the west end were nearly so. Of the opposite window, which had formed the back of the choir, very little remained. The top of it, with all its tracery, was gone, and three broken upright mullions of uneven heights alone remained. This was all that remained of the old window, but a transom or cross-bar of stone had been added to protect the carved stone-work of the sides, and save the form of the aperture from further

ruin. That this transom was modern was to be seen from the magnificent height and light grace of the workmanship in the other windows, in which the long slender mullions rose from the lower stage or foundation of the whole up into the middle tracery of the arch without protection or support, and then lost themselves among the curves, not running up into the roof or soppitt, and there holding on as though unable to stand alone. Such weakness as that had not as yet shown itself in English church architecture when Matching Priory was built.

"Is it not beautiful?" said Glencora. "I do love it so! And there is a peculiar feeling of cold about the chill of the moon, different from any other cold. It makes you wrap yourself up tight, but it does not make your teeth chatter; and it seems to go into your senses rather than into your bones. But I suppose that 's nonsense," she added, after a pause.

"Not more so than what people are supposed to talk by moonlight."

"That 's unkind. I 'd like what I say on such an occasion to be more poetical or else more nonsensical than what other people say under the same circumstances. And now I 'll tell you why I always think of you when I come here by moonlight."

"But I suppose you don't often come?"

"Yes, I do; that is to say, I did come very often when we had the full moon in August. The weather was n't like this, and I used to run out through the open windows and nobody knew where I was gone. I made him come once, but he did n't seem to care about it. I told him that part of the refectory wall was falling; so he looked at that, and had a mason

sent the next day. If anything is out of order he has it put to rights at once. There would have been no ruins if all the Pallisers had been like him."

"So much the better for the world."

"No;—I say no. Things may live too long. But now I 'm going to tell you. Do you remember that night I brought you home from the play to Queen Anne Street?"

"Indeed I do,—very well."

Alice had occasion to remember it, for it had been in the carriage on that evening that she had positively refused to give any aid to her cousin in that matter relating to Burgo Fitzgerald.

"And do you remember how the moon shone then?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"I know I do. As we came round the corner out of Cavendish Square he was standing there,—and a friend of yours was standing with him."

"What friend of mine?"

"Never mind that; it does not matter now."

"Do you mean my cousin George?"

"Yes, I do mean your cousin; and oh, Alice! dear Alice! I don't know why I should love you, for if you had not been hard-hearted that night,—stony cruel in your hard propriety, I should have gone with him then, and all this icy coldness would have been prevented."

She was standing quite close to Alice, and as she spake she shook with shivering and wrapped her furs closer and still closer about her.

"You are very cold," said Alice. "We had better go in."

"No, I am not cold,—not in that way. I won't go in yet. Jeffrey will come to us directly. Yes;—we

should have escaped that night if you would have allowed him to come into your house. Ah, well! we did n't, and there 's an end of it."

"But, Glencora,—you cannot regret it."

"Not regret it! Alice, where can your heart be? Or have you a heart? Not regret it! I would give everything I have in the world to have been true to him. They told me that he would spend my money. Though he should have spent every farthing of it, I regret it; though he should have made me a beggar, I regret it. They told me that he would ill-use me, and desert me,—perhaps beat me. I do not believe it; but even though that should have been so, I regret it. It is better to have a false husband than to be a false wife."

"Glencora, do not speak like that. Do not try to make me think that anything could tempt you to be false to your vows."

"Tempt me to be false! Why, child, it has been all false throughout. I never loved him. How can you talk in that way, when you know that I never loved him? They browbeat me and frightened me till I did as I was told;—and now;—what am I now?"

"You are his honest wife. Glencora, listen to me." And Alice took hold of her arm.

"No," she said, "no; I am not honest. By law I am his wife; but the laws are liars! I am not his wife. I will not say the thing that I am. When I went to him at the altar, I knew that I did not love the man that was to be my husband. But him,—Burgo,—I love him with all my heart and soul. I could stoop at his feet and clean his shoes for him, and think it no disgrace!"

"Oh, Cora, my friend, do not say such words as those! Remember what you owe your husband and yourself, and come away."

"I do know what I owe him, and I will pay it him. Alice, if I had a child I think I would be true to him. Think! I know I would;—though I had no hour of happiness left to me in my life. But what now is the only honest thing that I can do? Why, leave him;—so leave him that he may have another wife and be the father of a child. What injury shall I do him by leaving him? He does not love me; you know yourself that he does not love me."

"I know that he does."

"Alice, that is untrue. He does not; and you have seen clearly that it is so. It may be that he can love no woman. But another woman would give him a son, and he would be happy. I tell you that every day and every night,—every hour of every day and of every night,—I am thinking of the man I love. I have nothing else to think of. I have no occupation,—no friends,—no one to whom I care to say a word. But I am always talking to Burgo in my thoughts; and he listens to me. I dream that his arm is round me——"

"Oh, Glencora!"

"Well!—Do you begrudge me that I should tell you the truth? You have said that you would be my friend, and you must bear the burden of my friendship. And now,—this is what I want to tell you.—Immediately after Christmas, we are to go to Monkshade, and he will be there. Lady Monk is his aunt."

"You must not go. No power should take you there."

"That is easily said, child; but all the same I must

go. I told Mr. Palliser that he would be there, and he said it did not signify. He actually said that it did not signify. I wonder whether he understands what it is for people to love each other;—whether he has ever thought about it."

"You must tell him plainly that you will not go."

"I did. I told him plainly as words could tell him. 'Glencora,' he said,—and you know the way he looks when he means to be lord and master, and put on the very husband indeed,—'this is an annoyance which you must bear and overcome. It suits me that we should go to Monkshade, and it does not suit me that there should be any one whom you are afraid to meet.' Could I tell him that he would lose his wife if I did go? Could I threaten him that I would throw myself into Burgo's arms if that opportunity were given to me? You are very wise, and very prudent. What would you have had me say?"

"I would have you now tell him everything, rather than go to that house."

"Alice, look here. I know what I am, and what I am like to become. I loathe myself, and I loathe the thing that I am thinking of. I could have clung to the outside of a man's body, to his very trappings, and loved him ten times better than myself!—ay, even though he had ill-treated me,—if I had been allowed to choose a husband for myself. Burgo would have spent my money,—all that it would have been possible for me to give him. But there would have been something left, and I think that by that time I could have won even him to care for me. But with that man——! Alice, you are very wise. What am I to do?"

Alice had no doubt as to what her cousin should do.

She should be true to her marriage-vow, whether that vow when made were true or false. She should be true to it as far as truth would now carry her. And in order that she might be true, she should tell her husband as much as might be necessary to induce him to spare her the threatened visit to Monkshade. All that she said to Lady Glencora, as they walked slowly across the chapel. But Lady Glencora was more occupied with her own thoughts than with her friend's advice. "Here 's Jeffrey!" she said. "What an unconscionable time we have kept him!"

"Don't mention it," he said. "And I should n't have come to you now, only that I thought I should find you both freezing into marble."

"We are not such cold-blooded creatures as that, —are we, Alice?" said Lady Glencora. "And now we 'll go round the outside; only we must not stay long, or we shall frighten those two delicious old duennas, Mrs. Marsham and Mr. Bott."

These last words were said as it were in a whisper to Alice; but they were so whispered that there was no real attempt to keep them from the ears of Mr. Jeffrey Palliser. Glencora, Alice thought, should not have allowed the word duenna to have passed her lips in speaking to any one; but, above all, she should not have done so in the hearing of Mr. Palliser's cousin.

They walked all round the ruin, on a raised gravel-path which had been made there; and Alice, who could hardly bring herself to speak,—so full was her mind of that which had just been said to her,—was surprised to find that Glencora could go on, in her usual light humour, chatting as though there were no weight within her to depress her spirits.

CHAPTER II.

ALICE LEAVES THE PRIORY.

As they came in at the billiard-room door, Mr. Palliser was there to meet them. "You must be very cold," he said to Glencora, who entered first.

"No, indeed," said Glencora;—but her teeth were chattering, and her whole appearance gave the lie to her words.

"Jeffrey," said Mr. Palliser, turning to his cousin, "I am angry with you. You, at least, should have known better than to have allowed her to remain so long." Then Mr. Palliser turned away, and walked his wife off, taking no notice whatsoever of Miss Vavasor.

Alice felt the slight, and understood it all. He had told her plainly enough, though not in words, that he had trusted his wife with her, and that she had betrayed the trust. She might have brought Glencora in within five or six minutes, instead of allowing her to remain out there in the freezing night air for nearly three-quarters of an hour. That was the accusation which Mr. Palliser made against her, and he made it with the utmost severity. He asked no question of her whether she were cold. He spoke no word to her, nor did he even look at her. She might get herself away to her bedroom as she pleased. Alice understood all this completely, and though she knew that

she had not deserved such severity, she was not inclined to resent it. There was so much in Mr. Palliser's position that was to be pitied, that Alice could not find it in her heart to be angry with him.

"He is provoked with us, now," said Jeffrey Palliser, standing with her for a moment in the billiard-room, as he handed her a candle.

"He is afraid that she will have caught cold."

"Yes; and he thinks it wrong that she should remain out at night so long. You can easily understand, Miss Vavasor, that he has not much sympathy for romance."

"I dare say he is right," said Alice, not exactly knowing what to say, and not being able to forget what had been said about herself and Jeffrey Palliser when they first left the house. "Romance usually means nonsense, I believe."

"That is not Glencora's doctrine."

"No; but she is younger than I am. My feet are very cold, Mr. Palliser, and I think I will go up to my room."

"Good night," said Jeffrey, offering her his hand. "I think it so hard that you should have incurred his displeasure."

"It will not hurt me," said Alice, smiling.

"No;—but he does not forget."

"Even that will not hurt me. Good night, Mr. Palliser."

"As it is the last night, may I say good night, Alice? I shall be away to-morrow before you are up."

He still held her hand; but it had not been in his for half a minute, and she had thought nothing of that, nor did she draw it away even now suddenly. "No," said

she, "Glencora was very wrong there,—doing an injury without meaning it to both of us. There can be no possible reason why you should call me otherwise than is customary."

"Can there never be a reason?"

"No, Mr. Palliser. Good night;—and if I am not to see you to-morrow morning, good-bye."

"You will certainly not see me to-morrow morning."

"Good-bye. Had it not been for this folly of Glencora's, our acquaintance would have been very pleasant."

"To me it has been very pleasant. Good night."

Then she left him, and went up alone to her own room. Whether or no other guests were still left in the drawing-room she did not know; but she had seen that Mr. Palliser took his wife upstairs, and therefore she considered herself right in presuming that the party was broken up for the night. Mr. Palliser,—Plantagenet Palliser, according to all rules of courtesy should have said a word to her as he went; but, as I have said before, Alice was disposed to overlook his want of civility on this occasion. So she went up alone to her room, and was very glad to find herself able to get close to a good fire. She was, in truth, very cold—cold to her bones, in spite of what Lady Glencora had said on behalf of the moonlight. They two had been standing all but still during the greater part of the time that they had been talking, and Alice, as she sat herself down, found that her feet were numbed with the damp that had penetrated through her boots. Certainly Mr. Palliser had reason to be angry that his wife should have remained out in the night air so long,—though perhaps not with Alice.

And then she began to think of what had been told her, and to try to think of what, under such circumstances, it behoved her to do. She could not doubt that Lady Glencora had intended to declare that, if opportunity offered itself, she would leave her husband, and put herself under the protection of Mr. Fitzgerald; and Alice, moreover, had become painfully conscious that the poor deluded unreasoning creature had taught herself to think that she might excuse herself for this sin to her own conscience by the fact that she was childless, and that she might thus give to the man who had married her an opportunity of seeking another wife who might give him an heir. Alice well knew how insufficient such an excuse would be even to the wretched woman who had framed it for herself. But still it would operate,—manifestly had already operated, on her mind, teaching her to hope that good might come out of evil. Alice, who was perfectly clear-sighted as regarded her cousin, however much impaired her vision might have been with reference to herself, saw nothing but absolute ruin, ruin of the worst and most intolerable description, in the plan which Lady Glencora seemed to have formed. To her it was black as the depths of hell; and she knew that to Glencora also it was black. "I loathe myself," Glencora had said, "and the thing that I am thinking of."

What was Alice to do under these circumstances? Mr. Palliser, she was aware, had quarrelled with her: for in his silent way he had first shown that he had trusted her as his wife's friend; and then, on this evening, he had shown that he had ceased to trust her. But she cared little for this. If she told him that she wished to speak to him, he would listen, let his opinion

of her be what it might; and having listened he would surely act in some way that would serve to save his wife. What Mr. Palliser might think of herself, Alice cared but little.

But then there came to her an idea,—an idea that was in every respect feminine,—that in such a matter she had no right to betray her friend. When one woman tells the story of her love to another woman, the confidante always feels that she will be a traitor if she reveals the secret. Had Lady Glencora made Alice believe that she meditated murder, or robbery, Alice would have had no difficulty in telling the tale, and thus preventing the crime. But now she hesitated, feeling that she would disgrace herself by betraying her friend. And, after all, was it not more than probable that Glencora had no intention of carrying out a threat the very thought of which must be terrible to herself?

As she was thinking of all this, sitting in her dressing-gown close over the fire, there came a loud knock at the door, which, as she had turned the key, she was obliged to answer in person. She opened the door, and there was Iphigenia Palliser, Jeffrey's cousin, and Mr. Palliser's cousin. "Miss Vavasor," she said, "I know that I am taking a great liberty, but may I come into your room for a few minutes? I so much wish to speak to you!" Alice of course bade her enter, and placed a chair for her by the fire.

Alice Vavasor had made very little intimacy with either of the two Miss Pallisers. It had seemed to herself as though there had been two parties in the house, and that she had belonged to the one which was headed by the wife, whereas the Miss Pallisers had been naturally attached to that of the husband. These

ladies, as she had already seen, almost idolised their cousin; and though Plantagenet Palliser had till lately treated Alice with the greatest personal courtesy, there had been no intimacy of friendship between them, and consequently none between her and his special adherents. Nor was either of these ladies prone to sudden friendship with such a one as Alice Vavasor. A sudden friendship with a snuffy president of a foreign learned society, with some personally unknown lady employed on female emigration, was very much in their way. But Alice had not shown herself to be useful or learned, and her special intimacy with Lady Glencora had marked her out as in some sort separated from them and their ways.

"I know that I am intruding," said Miss Palliser, as though she were almost afraid of Alice.

"Oh dear, no," said Alice. "If I can do anything for you I shall be very happy."

"You are going to-morrow, and if I do not speak to you now I should have no other opportunity. Glencora seems to be very much attached to you, and we all thought it so good a thing that she should have such a friend."

"I hope you have not all changed your minds," said Alice, with a faint smile, thinking as she spoke that the "all" must have been specially intended to include the master of the house.

"Oh no;—by no means. I did not mean that. My cousin, Mr. Palliser, I mean, liked you so much when you came."

"And he does not like me quite so much now, because I went out in the moonlight with his wife. Is n't that it?"

"Well;—no, Miss Vavasor. I had not intended to mention that at all. I had not indeed. I have seen him certainly since you came in,—just for a minute, and he is vexed. But it is not about that that I would speak to you."

"I saw plainly enough that he was angry with me."

"He thought you would have brought her in earlier."

"And why should he think that I can manage his wife? She was the mistress out there as she is in here. Mr. Palliser has been unreasonable. Not that it signifies."

"I don't think he has been unreasonable; I don't, indeed, Miss Vavasor. He has certainly been vexed. Sometimes he has much to vex him. You see, Glencora is very young."

Mr. Bott also had declared that Lady Glencora was very young. It was probable, therefore, that that special phrase had been used in some discussion among Mr. Palliser's party as to Glencora's foibles. So thought Alice as the remembrance of the word came upon her.

"She is not younger than when Mr. Palliser married her," Alice said.

"You mean that if a man marries a young wife he must put up with the trouble. That is a matter of course. But their ages, in truth, are very suitable. My cousin himself is not yet thirty. When I say that Glencora is young——"

"You mean that she is younger in spirit, and perhaps in conduct, than he had expected to find her."

"But you are not to suppose that he complains, Miss Vavasor. He is much too proud for that."

"I should hope so," said Alice, thinking of Mr. Bott.

"I hardly know how to explain to you what I wish to say, or how far I may be justified in supposing that you will believe me to be acting solely on Glencora's behalf. I think you have some influence with her;—and I know no one else that has any."

"My friendship with her is not of very long date, Miss Palliser."

"I know it, but still there is the fact. Am I not right in supposing——"

"In supposing what?"

"In supposing that you had heard the name of Mr. Fitzgerald as connected with Glencora's before her marriage with my cousin?"

Alice paused a moment before she answered.

"Yes, I had," she then said.

"And I think you were agreed, with her other relations, that such a marriage would have been very dreadful."

"I never spoke of the matter in the presence of any relatives of Glencora's. You must understand, Miss Palliser, that though I am her far-away cousin, I do not even know her nearest connections. I never saw Lady Midlothian till she came here the other day."

"But you advised her to abandon Mr. Fitzgerald."

"Never!"

"I know she was much with you, just at that time."

"I used to see her, certainly."

Then there was a pause, and Miss Palliser, in truth, scarcely knew how to go on. There had been a hardness about Alice which her visitor had not expected,—an unwillingness to speak or even to listen, which made Miss Palliser almost wish that she were out of

the room. She had, however, mentioned Burgo Fitzgerald's name, and out of the room now she could not go without explaining why she had done so. But at this point Alice came suddenly to her assistance.

"Just then she was often with me," said Alice, continuing her reply; "and there was much talk between us about Mr. Fitzgerald. What was my advice then can be of little matter; but in this we shall be both agreed, Miss Palliser, that Glencora now should certainly not be called upon to be in his company."

"She has told you, then?"

"Yes;—she has told me."

"That he is to be at Lady Monk's?"

"She has told me that Mr. Palliser expects her to meet him at the place to which they are going when they leave the Duke's, and that she thinks it hard that she should be subjected to such a trial."

"It should be no trial, Miss Vavasor."

"How can it be otherwise? Come, Miss Palliser; if you are her friend, be fair to her."

"I am her friend;—but I am, above everything, my cousin's friend. He has told me that she has complained of having to meet this man. He declares that it should be nothing to her, and that the fear is an idle folly. It should be nothing to her, but still the fear may not be idle. Is there any reason,—any real reason,—why she should not go? Miss Vavasor, I conjure you to tell me,—even though in doing so you must cast so deep reproach upon her name! Anything will be better than utter disgrace and sin!"

"I conceive that I cast no reproach upon her in saying that there is great reason why she should not go to Monkshade."

"You think there is absolute ground for interference? I must tell him, you know, openly what he would have to fear."

"I think,—nay, Miss Palliser, I know,—that there is ample reason why you should save her from being taken to Monkshade, if you have the power to do so."

"I can only do it, or attempt to do it, by telling him just what you tell me."

"Then tell him. You must have thought of that, I suppose, before you came to me."

"Yes;—yes, Miss Vavasor. I had thought of it. No doubt I had thought of it. But I had believed all through that you would assure me that there was no danger. I believed that you would have said that she was innocent."

"And she is innocent," said Alice, rising from her chair, as though she might thus give emphasis to words which she hardly dared to speak above a whisper. "She is innocent. Who accuses her of guilt? You ask me a question on his behalf——"

"On hers—and on his, Miss Vavasor."

"A question which I feel myself bound to answer truly,—to answer with reference to the welfare of them both; but I will not have it said that I accuse her. She had been attached to Mr. Fitzgerald when your cousin married her. He knew that this had been the case. She told him the whole truth. In a worldly point of view her marriage with Mr. Fitzgerald would probably have been very imprudent."

"It would have been utterly ruinous."

"Perhaps so; I say nothing about that. But as it turned out, she gave up her own wishes and married your cousin."

"I don't know about her own wishes, Miss Vavasor."

"It is what she did. She would have married Mr. Fitzgerald, had she not been hindered by the advice of those around her. It cannot be supposed that she has forgotten him in so short a time. There can be no guilt in her remembrance."

"There is guilt in loving any other than her husband."

"Then, Miss Palliser, it was her marriage that was guilty, and not her love. But all that is done and past. It should be your cousin's object to teach her to forget Mr. Fitzgerald, and he will not do that by taking her to a house where that gentleman is staying."

"She has said so much to you herself?"

"I do not know that I need declare to you what she has said herself. You have asked me a question, and I have answered it, and I am thankful to you for having asked it. What object can either of us have but to assist her in her position?"

"And to save him from dishonour. I had so hoped that this was simply a childish dread on her part."

"It is not so. It is no childish dread. If you have the power to prevent her going to Lady Monk's, I implore you to use it. Indeed, I will ask you to promise me that you will do so."

"After what you have said, I have no alternative."

"Exactly. There is no alternative. Either for his sake or for hers, there is none."

Thereupon Miss Palliser got up, and wishing her companion good night, took her departure. Throughout the interview there had been no cordiality of feel-

ing between them. There was no pretence of friendship, even as they were parting. They acknowledged that their objects were different. That of Alice was to save Lady Glencora from ruin. That of Miss Palliser was to save her cousin from disgrace,—with perhaps some further honest desire to prevent sorrow and sin. One loved Lady Glencora, and the other clearly did not love her. But, nevertheless, Alice felt that Miss Palliser, in coming to her, had acted well, and that to herself this coming had afforded immense relief. Some step would now be taken to prevent that meeting which she had so deprecated, and it would be taken without any great violation of confidence on her part. She had said nothing as to which Lady Glencora could feel herself aggrieved.

On the next morning she was down in the breakfast-room soon after nine, and had not been in the room many minutes before Mr. Palliser entered. "The carriage is ordered for you at a quarter before ten," he said, "and I have come down to give you your breakfast." There was a smile on his face as he spoke, and Alice could see that he intended to make himself pleasant.

"Will you allow me to give you yours instead?" said she. But as it happened, no giving on either side was needed, as Alice's breakfast was brought to her separately.

"Glencora bids me say that she will be down immediately," said Mr. Palliser.

Alice then made some inquiry with reference to the effects of last night's imprudence, which received only a half-pronounced reply. Mr. Palliser was willing to be gracious, but did not intend to be understood as

having forgiven the offence. The Miss Pallisers then came in together, and after them Mr. Bott, closely followed by Mrs. Marsham, and all of them made inquiries after Lady Glencora, as though it was to be supposed that she might probably be in a perilous state after what she had undergone on the previous evening. Mr. Bott was particularly anxious. "The frost was so uncommonly severe," said he, "that any delicate person like Lady Glencowrer must have suffered in remaining out so long."

The insinuation that Alice was not a delicate person, and that, as regarded her, the severity of the frost was of no moment, was very open, and was duly appreciated. Mr. Bott was aware that his great patron had in some sort changed his opinion about Miss Vavasor, and he was of course disposed to change his own. A fortnight since Alice might have been as delicate as she pleased in Mr. Bott's estimation.

"I hope you do not consider Lady Glencora delicate," said Alice to Mr. Palliser.

"She is not robust," said the husband.

"By no means," said Mrs. Marsham.

"Indeed, no," said Mr. Bott.

Alice knew that she was being accused of being robust herself; but she bore it in silence. Ploughboys and milkmaids are robust, and the accusation was a heavy one. Alice, however, thought that she would not have minded it, if she could have allowed herself to reply; but this at the moment of her going away she could not do.

"I think she is as strong as the rest of us," said Iphigenia Palliser, who felt that after last night she owed something to Miss Vavasor.

"As some of us," said Mr. Bott, determined to persevere in his accusation.

At this moment Lady Glencora entered, and encountered the eager inquiries of her two duennas. These, however, she quickly put aside, and made her way up to Alice. "The last morning has come, then," she said.

"Yes, indeed," said Alice. "Mr. Palliser must have thought that I was never going."

"On the other hand," said he, "I have felt much obliged to you for staying." But he said it coldly; and Alice began to wish that she had never seen Matching Priory.

"Obliged!" exclaimed Lady Glencora. "I can't tell you how much obliged I am. Oh, Alice, I wish you were going to stay with us!"

"We are leaving this in a week's time," said Mr. Palliser.

"Of course we are," said Lady Glencora. "With all my heart I wish we were not. Dear Alice! I suppose we shall not meet till we are all in town."

"You will let me know when you come up," said Alice.

"I will send to you instantly; and, Alice, I will write to you from Gatherum,—or from Monkshade."

Alice could not help looking round and catching Miss Palliser's eye. Miss Palliser was standing with her foot on the fender, but was so placed that she could see Alice. She made a slight sign with her head, as much as to say that Lady Glencora must have no opportunity of writing from that latter place; but she said nothing.

Then the carriage was announced, and Mr. Pal-

liser took Alice out on his arm. "Don't come to the door, Glencora," he said. "I especially wish you not to do so." The two cousins then kissed each other, and Alice went away to the carriage.

"Good-bye, Miss Vavasor," said Mr. Palliser; but he expressed no wish that he might see her again as his guest at Matching Priory.

Alice, as she was driven in solitary grandeur to the railway station, could not but wish that she had never gone there.

CHAPTER III.

BURGO FITZGERALD.

On the night before Christmas Eve two men were sitting together in George Vavasor's rooms in Cecil Street. It was past twelve o'clock, and they were both smoking; there were square bottles on the table containing spirits, with hot water and cold water in jugs, and one of the two men was using, and had been using, these materials for enjoyment. Vavasor had not been drinking, nor did it appear as though he intended to begin. There was a little weak brandy and water in a glass by his side, but there it had remained untouched for the last twenty minutes. His companion, however, had twice in that time replenished his beaker, and was now puffing out the smoke of his pipe with the fury of a steamer's funnel when she has not yet burned black off her last instalment of fresh coals. This man was Burgo Fitzgerald. He was as handsome as ever;—a man whom neither man nor woman could help regarding as a thing beautiful to behold;—but not the less was there in his eyes and cheeks a look of haggard dissipation,—of riotous living, which had become wearisome, by its continuance, even to himself, —that told to all who saw him much of the history of his life. Most men who drink at nights, and are out till cockcrow doing deeds of darkness, become red in their faces, have pimpled cheeks and watery eyes, and

are bloated and not comfortable to be seen. It is a kind dispensation of Providence who thus affords to such sinners a visible sign, to be seen day by day, of the injury which is being done. The first approach of a carbuncle on the nose, about the age of thirty, has stopped many a man from drinking. No one likes to have carbuncles on his nose, or to appear before his female friends with eyes which look as though they were swimming in grog. But to Burgo Fitzgerald Providence in her anger had not afforded this protection. He became at times pale, sallow, worn, and haggard. He grew thin, and still thinner. At times he had been ill to death's door. Among his intimate friends there were those who heard him declare frequently that his liver had become useless to him; and that as for gastric juices, he had none left to him. But still his beauty remained. The perfect form of his almost godlike face was the same as ever, and the brightness of his bright blue eye was never quenched.

On the present occasion he had come to Vavasor's room with the object of asking from him certain assistance, and perhaps also some amount of advice. But as regarded the latter article he was, I think, in the state of most men when they seek for counsellors who shall counsel them to do evil. Advice administered in accordance with his own views would give him comfortable encouragement, but advice on the other side he was prepared to disregard altogether. These two men had known each other long, and a close intimacy had existed between them in the days past, previous to Lady Glencora's engagement with Mr. Palliser. When Lady Glencora endeavoured, vainly, as we know, to obtain aid from Alice Vava-

sor, Burgo had been instigated to believe that Alice's cousin might assist him. Any such assistance George Vavasor would have been quite ready to give. Some pecuniary assistance he had given, he at that time having been in good funds. Perhaps he had for a moment induced Burgo to think that he could obtain for the pair the use of the house in Queen Anne Street as a point at which they might meet, and from whence they might start on their journey of love. All that was over. Those hopes had been frustrated, and Lady Glencora M'Cluskie had become Lady Glencora Palliser and not Lady Glencora Fitzgerald. But now other hopes had sprung up, and Burgo was again looking to his friend for assistance.

"I believe she would," Burgo said, as he lifted the glass to his mouth. "It 's a thing of that sort that a man can only believe,—perhaps only hope,—till he has tried. I know that she is not happy with him, and I have made up my mind that I will at least ask her."

"But he would have her fortune all the same?"

"I don't know how that would be. I have n't inquired, and I don't mean to inquire. Of course I don't expect you or any one else to believe me, but her money has no bearing on the question now. Heaven knows I want money bad enough, but I would n't take away another man's wife for money."

"You don't mean to say you think it would be wicked. I supposed you to be above those prejudices."

"It 's all very well for you to chaff."

"It 's no chaff at all. I tell you fairly I would n't run away with any man's wife. I have an old-fash-

ioned idea that when a man has got a wife he ought to be allowed to keep her. Public opinion, I know, is against me."

"I think he ran away with my wife," said Burgo, with emphasis; "that 's the way I look at it. She was engaged to me first; and she really loved me, while she never cared for him."

"Nevertheless, marriage is marriage, and the law is against you. But if I did go in for such a troublesome job at all, I certainly should keep an eye upon the money."

"It can make no difference."

"It did make a difference, I suppose, when you first thought of marrying her?"

"Of course it did. My people brought us together because she had a large fortune and I had none. There 's no doubt in the world about that. And I 'll tell you what; I believe that old harridan of an aunt of mine is willing to do the same thing now again. Of course she does n't say as much. She would n't dare do that, but I do believe she means it. I wonder where she expects to go to!"

"That 's grateful on your part."

"Upon my soul I hate her. I do indeed. It is n't love for me now so much as downright malice against Palliser, because he balked her project before. She is a wicked old woman. Some of us fellows are wicked enough—you and I for instance——"

"Thank you. I don't know, however, that I am qualified to run in a curricle with you."

"But we are angels to such an old she-devil as that. You may believe me or not, as you like.—I dare say you won't believe me."

"I 'll say I do, at any rate."

"The truth is, I want to get her, partly because I love her; but chiefly because I do believe in my heart that she loves me."

"It 's for her sake then! You are ready to sacrifice yourself to do her a good turn."

"As for sacrificing myself, that 's done. I 'm a man utterly ruined and would cut my throat to-morrow for the sake of my relations, if I cared enough about them. I know my own condition pretty well. I have made a shipwreck of everything, and have now only got to go down among the breakers."

"Only you would like to take Lady Glencora with you."

"No, by heavens! But sometimes, when I do think about it at all,—which I do as seldom as I can,—it seems to me that I might still become a different fellow if it were possible for me to marry her."

"Had you married her when she was free to marry any one, and when her money was her own, it might have been so."

"I think it would be quite as much so now. I do, indeed. If I could get her once, say to Italy, or perhaps to Greece, I think I could treat her well, and live with her quietly. I know that I would try."

"Without the assistance of brandy and cigars?"

"Yes."

"And without any money?"

"With only a little. I know you 'll laugh at me; but I make pictures to myself of a sort of life which I think would suit us, and be very different from this hideous way of living, with which I have become so sick that I loathe it."

"Something like Juan and Haidee, with Planty Pall coming after you, like old Lambro." By the nickname of Planty Pall George Vavasor intended to designate Lady Glencora's present husband.

"He 'd get a divorce, of course, and then we should be married. I really don't think he 'd dislike it, when it was all done. They tell me he does n't care for her."

"You have seen her since her marriage?"

"Yes; twice."

"And have spoken to her?"

"Once only,—so as to be able to do more than ask her if she were well. Once, for about two minutes, I did speak to her."

"And what did she say?"

"She said it would be better that we should not meet. When she said that, I knew that she was still fond of me. I could have fallen at her feet that moment, only the room was full of people. I do think that she is fond of me."

Vavasor paused a few minutes. "I dare say she is fond of you," he then said; "but whether she has pluck for such a thing as this is more than I can say. Probably she has not. And if she has, probably you would fail in carrying out your plan."

"I must get a little money first," said Burgo.

"And that 's an operation which no doubt you find more difficult every day, as you grow older."

"It seems to be much the same sort of thing. I went to Magruin this morning."

"He 's the fellow that lives out near Gray's Inn Lane?"

"Just beyond the Foundling Hospital. I went to

him, and he was quite civil about it. He says I owe him over three thousand pounds, but that does n't seem to make any difference."

"How much did you ever have from him?"

"I don't recollect that I ever absolutely had any money. He got a bill of mine from a tailor who went to smash, and he kept on renewing that till it grew to be ever so many bills. I think he did once let me have twenty-four pounds,—but certainly never more than that."

"And he says he 'll give you money now? I suppose you told him why you wanted it."

"I did n't name her,—but I told him what would make him understand that I hoped to get off with a lady who had a lot of tin. I asked him for two hundred and fifty. He says he 'll let me have one hundred and fifty on a bill at two months for five hundred, —with your name to it."

"With my name to it! That 's kind on his part, —and on yours too."

"Of course I can't take it up at the end of two months."

"I dare say not," said Vavasor.

"But he won't come upon you then,—nor for a year or more afterwards. I did pay you what you lent me before."

"Yes, you did. I always thought that to be a special compliment on your part."

"And you 'll find I 'll pull you through now in some way. If I don't succeed in this I shall go off the hooks altogether soon; and if I were dead my people would pay my debts then."

Before the evening was over Vavasor promised the

assistance asked of him. He knew that he was lending his name to a man who was utterly ruined, and putting it into the hands of another man who was absolutely without conscience in the use he would make of it. He knew that he was creating for himself trouble, and in all probability loss, which he was ill able to bear. But the thing was one which came within the pale of his laws. Such assistance as that he might ask of others, and had asked and received before now. It was a reckless deed on his part, but then all his deeds were reckless. It was consonant with his mode of life.

"I thought you would, old fellow," said Burgo, as he got up to go away. "Perhaps, you know, I shall pull you through in this; and perhaps, after all, some part of her fortune will come with her. If so you 'll be all right."

"Perhaps I may. But look here, Burgo,—don't you give that fellow up the billt ill you 've got the money into your fist."

"You may be quite easy about that. I know their tricks. He and I will go to the bank together, and we shall squabble there at the door about four or five odd sovereigns,—and at last I shall have to give him up two or three. Beastly old robber! I declare I think he 's worse than I am myself." Then Burgo Fitzgerald took a little more brandy and water and went away.

He was living at this time in the house of one of his relatives in Cavendish Square, north of Oxford Street. His uncles and his aunts, and all those who were his natural friends, had clung to him with a tenacity that was surprising; for he had never been

true to any of them, and did not even pretend to like them. His father, with whom for many years he had not been on speaking terms, was now dead; but he had sisters whose husbands would still open their houses to him, either in London or in the country;—would open their houses to him, and lend him their horses, and provide him with every luxury which the rich enjoy,—except ready money. When the uttermost stress of pecuniary embarrassment would come upon him, they would pay something to stave off the immediate evil. And so Burgo went on. Nobody now thought of saying much to reproach him. It was known to be waste of words, and trouble in vain. They were still fond of him because he was beautiful and never vain of his beauty;—because in the midst of his recklessness there was always about him a certain kindliness which made him pleasant to those around him. He was soft and gracious with children, and would be very courteous to his lady cousins. They knew that as a man he was worthless, but nevertheless they loved him. I think the secret of it was chiefly in this,—that he seemed to think so little of himself.

But now as he walked home in the middle of the night from Cecil Street to Cavendish Square he did think much of himself. Indeed such self-thoughts come naturally to all men, be their outward conduct ever so reckless. Every man to himself is the centre of the whole world;—the axle on which it all turns. All knowledge is but his own perception of the things around him. All love, and care for others, and solicitude for the world's welfare, are but his own feelings as to the world's wants and the world's merits.

He had played his part as a centre of all things

very badly. Of that he was very well aware. He had sense enough to know that it should be a man's lot to earn his bread after some fashion, and he often told himself that never as yet had he earned so much as a penny roll. He had learned to comprehend that the world's progress depends on the way in which men do their duty by each other,—that the progress of one generation depends on the discharge of such duties by that which preceded it;—and he knew that he, in his generation, had done nothing to promote such progress. He thoroughly despised himself,—if there might be any good in that! But on such occasions as these, when the wine he had drunk was sufficient only to drive away from him the numbness of despair, when he was all alone with the cold night air upon his face, when the stars were bright above him and the world around him was almost quiet, he would still ask himself whether there might not yet be, even for him, some hope of a redemption,—some chance of a better life in store for him. He was still young,—wanting some years of thirty. Could there be, even for him, some mode of extrication from his misery?

We know what was the mode which now, at this moment, was suggesting itself to him. He was proposing to himself, as the best thing that he could do, to take away another man's wife and make himself happy with her! What he had said to Vavasor as to disregarding Lady Glencora's money had been perfectly true. That in the event of her going off with him, some portion of her enormous wealth would still cling to her, he did believe. Seeing that she had no children he could not understand where else it should

all go. But he thought of this as it regarded her, not as it regarded him. When he had before made his suit to her,—a suit which was then honourable, however disadvantageous it might have seemed to be to her,—he had made in his mind certain calculations as to the good things which would result to him if he were successful. He would keep hounds, and have three or four horses every day for his own riding, and he would have no more interviews with Magruin, waiting in that rogue's dingy back parlour for many a weary wretched half-hour, till the rogue should be pleased to show himself. So far he had been mercenary; but he had learned to love the girl, and to care more for her than for her money, and when the day of disappointment came upon him,—the day on which she had told him that all between them was to be over forever,—he had, for a few hours, felt the loss of his love more than the loss of his money.

Then he had had no further hope. No such idea as that which now filled his mind had then come upon him. The girl had gone from him and married another man, and there was an end of it. But by degrees tidings had reached him that she was not happy, —reaching him through the mouths of people who were glad to exaggerate all that they had heard. A whole tribe of his female relatives had been anxious to promote his marriage with Lady Glencora M'Cluskie, declaring that, after all that was come and gone, Burgo would come forth from his troubles as a man of great wealth. So great was the wealth of the heiress that it might withstand even his propensities for spending. That whole tribe had been bitterly disappointed; and when they heard that Mr. Palliser's marriage had

given him no child, and that Lady Glencora was unhappy,—they made their remarks in triumph rather than in sorrow. I will not say that they looked forward approvingly to such a step as that which Burgo now wished to take,—though as regarded his aunt, Lady Monk, he himself had accused her; but they whispered that such things had been done and must be expected, when marriages were made up as had been that marriage between Mr. Palliser and his bride.

As he walked on, thinking of his project, he strove hard to cheat himself into a belief that he would do a good thing in carrying Lady Glencora away from her husband. Bad as had been his life he had never before done aught so bad as that. The more fixed his intention became, the more thoroughly he came to perceive how great and grievous was the crime which he contemplated. To elope with another man's wife no longer appeared to him to be a joke at which such men as he might smile. But he tried to think that in this case there would be special circumstances which would almost justify him, and also her. They had loved each other and had sworn to love each other with constancy. There had been no change in the feelings or even in the wishes of either of them. But cold people had come between them with cold calculations, and had separated them. She had been, he told himself, made to marry a man she did not love. If they two loved each other truly, would it not still be better that they should come together? Would not the sin be forgiven on account of the injustice which had been done to them? Had Mr. Palliser a right to

expect more from a wife who had been made to marry him without loving him? Then he reverted to those dreams of a life of love, in some sunny country, of which he had spoken to Vavasor, and he strove to nourish them. Vavasor had laughed at him, talking of Juan and Haidee. But Vavasor, he said to himself, was a hard cold man, who had no touch of romance in his character. He would not be laughed out of his plan by such as he,—nor would he be frightened by the threat of any Lambro who might come after him, whether he might come in the guise of indignant uncle or injured husband.

He had crossed from Regent Street through Hanover Square, and as he came out by the iron gates into Oxford Street, a poor wretched girl, lightly clad in thin raiment, into whose bones the sharp freezing air was penetrating, asked him for money. Would he give her something to get drink, so that for a moment she might feel the warmth of her life renewed? Such midnight petitions were common enough in his ears, and he was passing on without thinking of her. But she was urgent, and took hold of him. "For love of God," she said, "if it 's only a penny to get a glass of gin! Feel my hand,—how cold it is." And she strove to put it up against his face.

He looked round at her and saw that she was very young,—sixteen, perhaps, at the most, and that she had once,—nay, very lately,—been exquisitely pretty. There still lingered about her eyes some remains of that look of perfect innocency and pure faith which had been hers not more than twelve months since. And now, at midnight, in the middle of the streets, she

was praying for a pennyworth of gin, as the only comfort she knew, or could expect!

"You are cold!" said he, trying to speak to her cheerily.

"Cold!" said she, repeating the word, and striving to wrap herself closer in her rags, as she shivered—"Oh God! if you knew what it was to be as cold as I am! I have nothing in the world,—not one penny,—not a hole to lie in!"

"We are alike then," said Burgo, with a slight low laugh. "I also have nothing. You cannot be poorer than I am."

"You poor!" she said. And then she looked up into his face. "Gracious; how beautiful you are! Such as you are never poor."

He laughed again,—in a different tone. He always laughed when any one told him of his beauty. "I am a deal poorer than you, my girl," he said. "You have nothing. I have thirty thousand pounds worse than nothing. But come along, and I will get you something to eat."

"Will you?" said she, eagerly. Then looking up at him again, she exclaimed—"Oh, you are so handsome!"

He took her to a public-house and gave her bread and meat and beer, and stood by her while she ate it. She was shy with him then, and would fain have taken it to a corner by herself, had he allowed her. He perceived this, and turned his back to her, but still spoke to her a word or two as she ate. The woman at the bar who served him looked at him wonderingly, staring into his face; and the potboy woke himself thoroughly that he might look at Burgo; and the waterman from

the cab-stand stared at him; and women who came in for gin looked almost lovingly up into his eyes. He regarded them all not at all, showing no feeling of disgrace at his position, and no desire to carry himself as a ruffler. He quietly paid what was due when the girl had finished her meal, and then walked with her out of the shop. "And now," said he, "what must I do with you? If I give you a shilling can you get a bed?" She told him that she could get a bed for sixpence. "Then keep the other sixpence for your breakfast," said he. "But you must promise me that you will buy no gin to-night." She promised him, and then he gave her his hand as he wished her good night;—his hand, which it had been the dearest wish of Lady Glencora to call her own. She took it and pressed it to her lips. "I wish I might once see you again," she said, "because you are so good and so beautiful." He laughed again cheerily, and walked on, crossing the street towards Cavendish Square. She stood looking at him till he was out of sight, and then as she moved away,—let us hope to the bed which his bounty had provided, and not to a gin-shop,—she exclaimed to herself again and again, "Gracious, how beautiful he was!" "He 's a good un," the woman at the public-house had said as soon as he left it; "but, my! did you ever see a man's face handsome as that fellow's?"

Poor Burgo! All who had seen him since life had begun with him had loved him and striven to cherish him. And with it all, to what a state had he come! Poor Burgo! had his eyes been less brightly blue, and his face less godlike in form, it may be that things would have gone better with him. A sweeter-tempered man than he never lived,—nor one who was of a kinder

nature. At this moment he had barely money about him to take him down to his aunt's house at Monkshade, and as he had promised to be there before Christmas Day, he was bound to start on the next morning, before help from Mr. Magruin was possible. Nevertheless, out of his very narrow funds he had given half-a-crown to comfort the poor creature who had spoken to him in the street.

CHAPTER IV.

CONTAINING A LOVE-LETTER.

Vavasor, as he sat alone in his room after Fitzgerald had left him, began to think of the days in which he had before wished to assist his friend in his views with reference to Lady Glencora;—or rather he began to think of Alice's behaviour then, and of Alice's words. Alice had steadfastly refused to give any aid. No less likely assistant for such a purpose could have been selected. But she had been very earnest in declaring that it was Glencora's duty to stand by her promise to Burgo. "He is a desperate spendthrift," Kate Vavasor had said to her. "Then let her teach him to be otherwise," Alice had answered. "That might have been a good reason for refusing his offer when he first made it; but it can be no excuse for untruth, now that she has told him that she loves him!" "If a woman," she had said again, "won't venture her fortune for the man she loves, her love is not worth having." All this George Vavasor remembered now; and as he remembered it he asked himself whether the woman that had once loved him would venture her fortune for him still.

Though his sister had pressed him on the subject with all the vehemence that she could use, he had hardly hitherto made up his mind that he really desired to marry Alice. There had grown upon him

lately certain Bohemian propensities,—a love of absolute independence in his thoughts as well as actions,—which were antagonistic to marriage. He was almost inclined to think that marriage was an old-fashioned custom, fitted indeed well enough for the usual dull life of the world at large,—as many men both in heathen and in Christian ages have taught themselves to think of religion,—but which was not adapted to his advanced intelligence. If he loved any woman he loved his cousin Alice. If he thoroughly respected any woman he respected her. But that idea of tying himself down to a household was in itself distasteful to him. "It is a thing terrible to think of," he once said to a congenial friend in these days of his life, "that a man should give permission to a priest to tie him to another human being like a Siamese twin, so that all power of separate and solitary action should be taken from him forever! The beasts of the field do not treat each other so badly. They neither drink themselves drunk, nor eat themselves stupid;—nor do they bind themselves together in a union which both would have to hate." In this way George Vavasor, trying to imitate the wisdom of the brutes, had taught himself some theories of a peculiar nature. But, nevertheless, as he thought of Alice Vavasor on this occasion, he began to feel that if a Siamese twin were necessary for him, she of all others was the woman to whom he would wish to be so bound.

And if he did it at all, he must do it now. Under the joint instigation of himself and his sister,—as he thought, and perhaps not altogether without reason,—she had broken her engagement with Mr. Grey. That she would renew it again if left to herself, he believed

probable. And then, despite that advanced intelligence which had taught him to regard all forms and ceremonies with the eye of a philosopher, he had still enough of human frailty about him to feel keenly alive to the pleasure of taking from John Grey the prize which John Grey had so nearly taken from him. If Alice could have been taught to think as he did as to the absurdity of those indissoluble ties, that would have been better. But nothing would have been more impossible than the teaching of such a lesson to his cousin Alice. George Vavasor was a man of courage, and dared do most things;—but he would not have dared to commence the teaching of such a lesson to her.

And now, at this moment, what was his outlook into life generally? He had very high ambition, and a fair hope of gratifying it if he could only provide that things should go well with him for a year or so. He was still a poor man, having been once nearly a rich man; but still so much of the result of his nearly acquired riches remained to him, that on the strength of them he might probably find his way into Parliament. He had paid the cost of the last attempt, and might, in a great degree, carry on this present attempt on credit. If he succeeded there would be open to him a mode of life, agreeable in itself, and honourable among men. But how was he to bear the cost of this for the next year, or the next two years? His grandfather was still alive, and would probably live over that period. If he married Alice he would do so with no idea of cheating her out of her money. She should learn,—nay, she had already learned from his own lips, —how perilous was his enterprise. But he knew her to be a woman who would boldly risk all in money,

though no consideration would induce her to stir a hair's breadth towards danger in reputation. Towards teaching her that doctrine at which I have hinted, he would not have dared to make an attempt; but he felt that he should have no repugnance to telling her that he wanted to spend all her money in the first year or two of their married life!

He was still in his arm-chair, thinking of all this, with that small untasted modicum of brandy and water beside him, when he heard some distant Lambeth clock strike three from over the river. Then he rose from his seat, and taking the candles in his hand, sat himself down at a writing-desk on the other side of the room. "I need n't send it when it 's written," he said to himself, "and the chances are that I won't." Then he took his paper, and wrote as follows:—

"Dear Alice,—The time was when the privilege was mine of beginning my letters to you with a warmer show of love than the above word contains,—when I might and did call you dearest; but I lost that privilege through my own folly, and since that it has been accorded to another. But you have found,—with a thorough honesty of purpose than which I know nothing greater,—that it has behoved you to withdraw that privilege also. I need hardly say that I should not have written as I now write, had you not found it expedient to do as you have done.

"I now once again ask you to be my wife. In spite of all that passed in those old days,—of all the selfish folly of which I was then guilty, I think you know, and at the time knew, that I ever loved you. I claim to say for myself that my love to you was true

from first to last, and I claim from you belief for that statement. Indeed I do not think that you ever doubted my love.

"Nevertheless, when you told me that I might no longer hope to make you my wife, I had no word of remonstrance that I could utter. You acted as any woman would act whom love had not made a fool. Then came the episode of Mr. Grey; and bitter as have been my feelings whilst that engagement lasted, I never made any attempt to come between you and the life you had chosen. In saying this I do not forget the words which I spoke last summer at Basle, when, as far as I knew, you still intended that he should be your husband. But what I said then was nothing to that which, with much violence, I refrained from saying. Whether you remember those few words I cannot tell; but certainly you would not have remembered them,—would not even have noticed them, —had your heart been at Nethercoats.

"But all this is nothing. You are now again a free woman; and once again I ask you to be my wife. We are both older than we were when we loved before, and will both be prone to think of marriage in a somewhat different light. Then personal love for each other was most in our thoughts. God forbid that it should not be much in our thoughts now! Perhaps I am deceiving myself in saying that it is not even now stronger in mine than any other consideration. But we have both reached that time of life, when it is probable that in any proposition of marriage we should think more of our adaptability to each other than we did before. For myself I know that there is much in my character and disposition to make me unfit to marry a woman

of the common stamp. You know my mode of life, and what are my hopes and my chances of success. I run great risk of failing. It may be that I shall encounter ruin where I look for reputation and a career of honour. The chances are perhaps more in favour of ruin than of success. But, whatever may be the chances, I shall go on as long as any means of carrying on the fight are at my disposal. If you were my wife to-morrow I should expect to use your money, if it were needed, in struggling to obtain a seat in Parliament and a hearing there. I will hardly stoop to tell you that I do not ask you to be my wife for the sake of this aid;—but if you were to become my wife I should expect all your co-operation;—with your money, possibly, but certainly with your warmest spirit.

"And now, once again, Alice,—dearest Alice, will you be my wife? I have been punished, and I have kissed the rod,—as I never kissed any other rod. You cannot accuse my love. Since the time in which I might sit with my arm round your waist, I have sat with it round no other waist. Since your lips were mine, no other lips have been dear to me. Since you were my counsellor, I have had no other counsellor,—unless it be poor Kate, whose wish that we may at length be married is second in earnestness only to my own. Nor do I think you will doubt my repentance. Such repentance indeed claims no merit, as it has been the natural result of the loss which I have suffered. Providence has hitherto been very good to me in not having made that loss irremediable by your marriage with Mr. Grey. I wish you now to consider the matter well, and to tell me whether you can pardon me and still love me. Do I flatter myself when I feel that

I doubt your pardon almost more than I doubt your love?

"Think of this thing in all its bearings before you answer me. I am so anxious that you should think of it that I will not expect your reply till this day week. It can hardly be your desire to go through life unmarried. I should say that it must be essential to your ambition that you should join your lot to that of some man the nature of whose aspirations would be like to your own. It is because this was not so as regarded him whose suit you had accepted, that you found yourself at last obliged to part from him. May I not say that with us there would be no such difference? It is because I believe that in this respect we are fitted for each other, as man and woman seldom are fitted, that I once again ask you to be my wife.

"This will reach you at Vavasor, where you will now be with the old squire and Kate. I have told her nothing of my purpose in writing this letter. If it should be that your answer is such as I desire, I should use the opportunity of our re-engagement to endeavour to be reconciled to my grandfather. He has misunderstood me and has ill-used me. But I am ready to forgive that, if he will allow me to do so. In such case you and Kate would arrange that, and I would, if possible, go down to Vavasor while you are there. But I am galloping on ahead foolishly in thinking of this, and am counting up my wealth while the crockery in my basket is so very fragile. One word from you will decide whether or no I shall ever bring it into market.

"If that word is to be adverse do not say anything of a meeting between me and the squire. Under such circumstances it would be impossible. But, oh, Alice!

do not let it be adverse. I think you love me. Your woman's pride towards me has been great and good and womanly; but it has had its way; and, if you love me, might now be taught to succumb.

"Dear Alice, will you be my wife?

"Yours, in any event, most affectionately,

"GEORGE VAVASOR."

Vavasor, when he had finished his letter, went back to his seat over the fire, and there he sat with it close at his hand for nearly an hour. Once or twice he took it up with fingers almost itching to throw it into the fire. He took it up and held the corners between his forefinger and thumb, throwing forward his hand towards the flame, as though willing that the letter should escape from him and perish if chance should so decide. But chance did not so decide, and the letter was put back upon the table at his elbow. Then when the hour was nearly over he read it again. "I 'll bet two to one that she gives way," he said to himself, as he put the sheet of paper back into the envelope. "Women are such out-and-out fools." Then he took his candle, and carrying his letter with him, went into his bedroom.

The next morning was the morning of Christmas Eve. At about nine o'clock a boy came into his room who was accustomed to call for orders for the day. "Jem," he said to the boy, "there 's half-a-crown lying there on the looking-glass." Jem looked and acknowledged the presence of the half-crown. "Is it a head or a tail, Jem?" asked the boy's master. Jem scrutinised the coin, and declared that the uppermost surface showed a tail. "Then take that letter and post it,"

said George Vavasor. Whereupon Jem, asking no question, and thinking but little of the circumstances under which the command was given, did take the letter and did post it. In due accordance with postal regulations it reached Vavasor Hall and was delivered to Alice on the Christmas morning.

A merry Christmas did not fall to the lot of George Vavasor on the present occasion. An early Christmas-box he did receive in the shape of a very hurried note from his friend Burgo. "This will be brought to you by Stickling," the note said; but who Stickling was Vavasor did not know. "I send the bill. Could n't you get the money and send it me, as I don't want to go up to town again before the thing comes off? You 're a trump; and will do the best you can. Don't let that rogue off for less than a hundred and twenty. —Yours, B. F." Vavasor, therefore, having nothing better to do, spent his Christmas morning in calling on Mr. Magruin.

"Oh, Mr. Vavasor," said Magruin; "really this is no morning for business!"

"Time and tide wait for no man, Mr. Magruin, and my friend wants his money to-morrow."

"Oh, Mr. Vavasor,—to-morrow!"

"Yes, to-morrow. If time and tide won't wait, neither will love. Come, Mr. Magruin, out with your cheque-book, and don't let 's have any nonsense."

"But is the lady sure, Mr. Vavasor?" asked Mr. Magruin, anxiously.

"Ladies never are sure," said Vavasor; "hardly more sure than bills made over to money-lenders. I 'm not going to wait here all day. Are you going to give him the money?"

"Christmas Day, Mr. Vavasor! There 's no getting money in the City to-day."

But Vavasor before he left did get the money from Mr. Magruin,—122*l.* 10*s.*—for which an acceptance at two months for 500*l.* was given in exchange,—and carried it off in triumph. "Do tell him to be punctual," said Mr. Magruin, when Vavasor took his leave. "I do so like young men to be punctual. But I really think Mr. Fitzgerald is the most unpunctual young man I ever did know yet."

"I think he is," said George Vavasor, as he went away.

He ate his Christmas dinner in absolute solitude at an eating-house near his lodgings. It may be supposed that no man dares to dine at his club on a Christmas Day. He at any rate did not so dare;—and after dinner he wandered about through the streets, wondering within his mind how he would endure the restraints of married life. And the same dull monotony of his days was continued for a week, during which he waited, not impatiently, for an answer to his letter. And before the end of the week the answer came.

CHAPTER V.

AMONG THE FELLS.

ALICE came down to breakfast on that Christmas morning at Vavasor Hall without making any sign as to the letter she had received. The party there consisted of her grandfather, her father, her cousin Kate, and herself. They all made their Christmas salutations as is usual, and Alice received and made hers as did the others, without showing that anything had occurred to disturb her tranquillity. Kate remarked that she had heard that morning from Aunt Greenow, and promised to show Alice the letter after breakfast. But Alice said no word of her own letter.

"Why did n't your aunt come here to eat her Christmas dinner?" said the squire.

"Perhaps, sir, because you did n't ask her," said Kate, standing close to her grandfather,—for the old man was somewhat deaf.

"And why did n't you ask her;—that is, if she stands upon asking to come to her old home?"

"Nay, sir, but I could n't do that without your bidding. We Vavasors are not always fond of meeting each other."

"Hold your tongue, Kate. I know what you mean, and you should be the last to speak of it. Alice, my dear, come and sit next to me. I am much obliged to you for coming down all this way to see your old

grandfather at Christmas. I am indeed. I only wish you had brought better news about your sweetheart."

"She 'll think better of it before long, sir," said her father.

"Papa, you should n't say that. You would not wish me to marry against my own judgment."

"I don't know much about ladies' judgments," said the old man. "It does seem to me that when a lady makes a promise she ought to keep it."

"According to that," said Kate, "if I were engaged to a man, and found that he was a murderer, I still ought to marry him."

"But Mr. Grey is not a murderer," said the squire.

"Pray,—pray, don't talk about it," said Alice. "If you do I really cannot sit and hear it."

"I have given over saying anything on the subject," said John Vavasor, speaking as though he had already expended upon it a vast amount of paternal eloquence. He had, however, never said more than has been recorded in these pages. Alice, during this conversation, sat with her cousin's letter in her pocket, and as yet had not even begun to think what should be the nature of her reply.

The squire of Vavasor Hall was a stout old man, with a red face and grey eyes, which looked fiercely at you, and with long grey hair, and a rough grey beard, which gave him something of the appearance of an old lion. He was passionate, unreasoning, and specially impatient of all opposition; but he was affectionate, prone to forgive when asked to do so, unselfish, and hospitable. He was, moreover, guided strictly by rules, which he believed to be rules of right. His grandson George had offended him very deeply,—had

offended him and never asked his pardon. He was determined that such pardon should never be given, unless it were asked for with almost bended knees; but, nevertheless, this grandson should be his heir. That was his present intention. The right of primogeniture could not, in accordance with his theory, be abrogated by the fact that it was, in George Vavasor's case, protected by no law. The squire could leave Vavasor Hall to whom he pleased, but he could not have hoped to rest quietly in his grave should it be found that he had left it to any one but the eldest son of his own eldest son. Though violent, and even stern, he was more prone to love than to anger; and though none of those around him dared to speak to him of his grandson, yet he longed in his heart for some opportunity of being reconciled to him.

The whole party went to church on this Christmas morning. The small parish church of Vavasor, an unpretending wooden structure, with a single bell which might be heard tinkling for a mile or two over the fells, stood all alone about half a mile from the squire's gate. Vavasor was a parish situated on the intermediate ground between the mountains of the lake country and the plains. Its land was unproductive, ill-drained, and poor, and yet it possessed little or none of the beauty which tourists go to see. It was all amidst the fells, and very dreary. There were long skirtings of dark pines around a portion of the squire's property, and at the back of the house there was a thick wood of firs running up to the top of what was there called the Beacon Hill. Through this there was a wild steep walk which came out upon the moorland, and from thence there was a track across the mountain to Hawes

Water and Naddale, and on over many miles to the further beauties of Bowness and Windermere. They who knew the country, and whose legs were of use to them, could find some of the grandest scenery in England within reach of a walk from Vavasor Hall; but to others the place was very desolate. For myself, I can find I know not what of charm in wandering over open, unadorned moorland. It must be more in the softness of the grass to the feet, and the freshness of the air to the lungs, than in anything that meets the eye. You might walk for miles and miles to the northeast, or east, or southeast of Vavasor without meeting any object to arrest the view. The great road from Lancaster to Carlisle crossed the outskirt of the small parish about a mile from the church, and beyond that the fell seemed to be interminable. Towards the north it rose, and towards the south it fell, and it rose and fell very gradually. Here and there some slight appearance of a valley might be traced which had been formed by the action of the waters; but such breakings of ground were inconsiderable, and did not suffice to interrupt the stern sameness of the everlasting moorland.

The daily life at Vavasor was melancholy enough for such a one as the squire's son, who regarded London as the only place on the earth's surface in which a man could live with comfort. The moors offered no charms to him. Nor did he much appreciate the homely comforts of the Hall; for the house, though warm, was old-fashioned and small, and the squire's cook was nearly as old as the squire himself. John Vavasor's visits to Vavasor were always visits of duty rather than of pleasure. But it was not so with Alice.

She could be very happy there with Kate; for, like herself, Kate was a good walker and loved the mountains. Their regard for each other had grown and become strong because they had gone together o'er river and moor, and because they had together disregarded those impediments of mud and wet which frighten so many girls away from the beauties of nature.

On this Christmas Day they all went to church, the squire being accompanied by Alice in a vehicle which in Ireland is called an inside jaunting-car, and which is perhaps the most uncomfortable kind of vehicle yet invented; while John Vavasor walked with his niece. But the girls had arranged that immediately after church they would start for a walk up the Beacon Hill, across the fells, towards Hawes Water. They always dined at the Hall at the vexatious hour of five; but as their church service, with the sacrament included, would be completed soon after twelve, and as lunch was a meal which the squire did not himself attend, they could have full four hours for their excursion. This had all been planned before Alice received her letter; but there was nothing in that to make her change her mind about the walk.

"Alice, my dear," said the old man to her when they were together in the jaunting-car, "you ought to get married." The squire was hard of hearing, and under any circumstances an inside jaunting-car is a bad place for conversation, as your teeth are nearly shaken out of your head by every movement which the horse makes. Alice therefore said nothing, but smiled faintly, in reply to her grandfather. On returning from church he insisted that Alice should again accompany him, telling her specially that he desired

to speak to her. "My dear child," he said, "I have been thinking a great deal about you, and you ought to get married."

"Well, sir, perhaps I shall some day."

"Not if you quarrel with all your suitors," said the old man. "You quarrelled with your cousin George, and now you have quarrelled with Mr. Grey. You 'll never get married, my dear, if you go on in that way."

"Why should I be married more than Kate?"

"Oh, Kate! I don't know that anybody wants to marry Kate. I wish you 'd think of what I say. If you don't get married before long, perhaps you 'll never get married at all. Gentlemen won't stand that kind of thing forever."

The two girls took a slice of cake, each in her hand, and started on their walk. "We shan't be able to get to the lake," said Kate.

"No," said Alice; "but we can go as far as the big stone on Swindale Fell, where we can sit down and see it."

"Do you remember the last time we sat there?" said Kate. "It is nearly three years ago, and it was then that you told me that all was to be over between you and George. Do you remember what a fool I was, and how I screamed in my sorrow? I sometimes wonder at myself and my own folly. How is it that I can never get up any interest about my own belongings? And then we got soaking wet through coming home."

"I remember that very well."

"And how dark it was! That was in September, but we had dined early. If we go as far as Swindale we shall have it very dark coming home to-day;—but

I don't mind that through the Beacon Wood, because I know my way so well. You won't be afraid of half an hour's dark?"

"Oh no," said Alice.

"Yes; I do remember that day. Well; it 's all for the best, I suppose. And now I must read you my aunt's letter." Then, while they were still in the wood, Kate took out the letter from her aunt and read it, while they still walked slowly up the hill. It seemed that hitherto neither of her two suitors had brought the widow to terms. Indeed, she continued to write of Mr. Cheesacre as though that gentleman were inconsolable for the loss of Kate, and gave her niece much serious advice as to the expedience of returning to Norfolk, in order that she might secure so eligible a husband. "You must understand all the time, Alice," said Kate, pausing as she read the letter, "that the dear man has never given me the slightest ground for the faintest hope, and that I know to a certainty that he makes an offer to her twice a week, —that is, on every market-day. You can't enjoy half the joke if you won't bear that in mind." Alice promised that she would bear it all in mind, and then Kate went on with her reading. Poor Bellfield was working very hard at his drill, Mrs. Greenow went on to say; so hard that sometimes she really thought the fatigue would be too much for his strength. He would come in sometimes of an evening and just take a cup of tea;—generally on Mondays and Thursdays. "These are not market-days at Norwich," said Kate; "and thus unpleasant meetings are avoided." "He comes in," said Mrs. Greenow, "and takes a little tea; and sometimes I think that he will faint at my feet."

"That he kneels there on every occasion," said Kate, "and repeats his offer also twice a week, I have not the least doubt in the world."

"And will she accept him at last?"

"Really I don't know what to think of it. Sometimes I fancy that she likes the fun of the thing, but that she is too wide-awake to put herself into any man's power. I have no doubt she lends him money, because he wants it sadly and she is very generous. She gives him money, I feel sure, but takes his receipt on stamped paper for every shilling. That 's her character all over."

The letter then went on to say that the writer had made up her mind to remain at Norwich certainly through the winter and spring, and that she was anxiously desirous that her dear Kate should go back to her. "Come and have one other look at Oily-mead," said the letter, "and then, if you make up your mind that you don't like it or him, I won't ask you to think of them ever again. I believe him to be a very honest fellow." "Did you ever know such a woman?" said Kate; "with all her faults I believe she would go through fire and water to serve me. I think she 'd lend me money without any stamped paper." Then Aunt Greenow's letter was put up, and the two girls had come out upon the open fell.

It was a delicious afternoon for a winter's walk. The air was clear and cold, but not actually frosty. The ground beneath their feet was dry, and the sky, though not bright, had that appearance of enduring weather which gives no foreboding of rain. There is a special winter's light, which is very clear though devoid of all brilliancy,—through which every object

strikes upon the eye with well-marked lines, and under which almost all forms of nature seem graceful to the sight if not actually beautiful. But there is a certain melancholy which ever accompanies it. It is the light of the afternoon, and gives token of the speedy coming of the early twilight. It tells of the shortness of the day, and contains even in its clearness a promise of the gloom of night. It is absolute light, but it seems to contain the darkness which is to follow it. I do not know that it is ever to be seen and felt so plainly as on the wide moorland, where the eye stretches away over miles, and sees at the world's end the faint low lines of distant clouds settling themselves upon the horizon. Such was the light of this Christmas afternoon, and both the girls had felt the effects of it before they reached the big stone on Swindale Fell, from which they intended to look down upon the loveliness of Hawes Water. As they went up through the wood there had been some laughter between them over Aunt Greenow's letter; and they had discussed almost with mirth the merits of Oilymead and Mr. Cheesacre; but as they got further on to the fell, and as the half-melancholy wildness of the place struck them, their words became less light, and after a while they almost ceased to speak.

Alice had still her letter in her pocket. She had placed it there when she came down to breakfast, and had carried it with her since. She had come to no resolution as yet as to her answer to it, nor had she resolved whether or no she would show it to Kate. Kate had ever been regarded by her as her steadfast friend. In all these affairs she had spoken openly to Kate. We know that Kate had in part betrayed her,

but Alice suspected no such treason. She had often quarrelled with Kate; but she had quarrelled with her not on account of any sin against the faith of their friendship. She believed in her cousin perfectly, though she found herself often called upon to disagree with her almost violently. Why should she not show this letter to Kate, and discuss it in all its bearings before she replied to it? This was in her mind as she walked silently along over the fell.

The reader will surmise from this that she was already half inclined to give way, and to join her lot to that of her cousin George. Alas, yes! The reader will be right in his surmise. And yet it was not her love for the man that prompted her to run so terrible a risk. Had it been so, I think that it would be easier to forgive her. She was beginning to think that love,—the love of which she had once thought so much,—did not matter. Of what use was it, and to what had it led? What had love done for her friend Glencora? What had love done for her? Had she not loved John Grey, and had she not felt that with all her love life with him would have been distasteful to her? It would have been impossible for her to marry a man whom personally she disliked;—but she liked her cousin George,—well enough, as she said to herself almost indifferently.

Upon the whole it was a grievous task to her in these days,—this having to do something with her life. Was it not all vain and futile? As for that girl's dream of the joys of love which she had once dreamed,—that had gone from her slumbers, never to return. How might she best make herself useful,—useful in some sort that might gratify her ambition;—

that was now the question which seemed to her to be of most importance.

Her cousin's letter to her had been very crafty. He had studied the whole of her character accurately as he wrote it. When he had sat down to write it he had been indifferent to the result; but he had written it with that care to attain success which a man uses when he is anxious not to fail in an attempt. Whether or no he cared to marry his cousin was a point so little interesting to him that chance might decide it for him; but when chance had decided that he did wish it, it was necessary for his honour that he should have that for which he condescended to ask.

His letter to her had been clever and very crafty. "At any rate he does me justice," she said to herself, when she read those words about her money, and the use which he proposed to make of it. "He is welcome to it all if it will help him in his career, whether he has it as my friend or as my husband." Then she thought of Kate's promise of her little mite, and declared to herself that she would not be less noble than her cousin Kate. And would it not be well that she should be the means of reconciling George to his grandfather? George was the representative of the family,—of a family so old that no one now knew which had first taken the ancient titular name of some old Saxon landowner,—the parish, or the man. There had been in old days some worthy Vavaseurs, as Chaucer calls them, whose rank and bearing had been adopted on that moorland side. Of these things Alice thought much, and felt that it should be her duty so to act, that future Vavasors might at any rate not be less in the world than they who had passed away. In a few years at furthest,

George Vavasor must be Vavasor of Vavasor. Would it not be right that she should help him to make that position honourable?

They walked on, exchanging now and again a word or two, till the distant Cumberland mountains began to form themselves in groups of beauty before their eyes. "There 's Helvellyn at last," said Kate. "I 'm always happy when I see that." "And is n't that Kidsty Pyk?" asked Alice. "No; you don't see Kidsty yet. But you will when you get up to the bank there. That 's Scaw Fell on the left;—the round distant top. I can distinguish it, though I doubt whether you can." Then they went on again, and were soon at the bank from whence the sharp top of the mountain which Alice had named was visible. "And now we are on Swindale, and in five minutes we shall get to the stone."

In less than five minutes they were there; and then, but not till then, the beauty of the little lake, lying down below them in the quiet bosom of the hills, disclosed itself. A lake should, I think, be small, and should be seen from above, to be seen in all its glory. The distance should be such that the shadows of the mountains on its surface may just be traced, and that some faint idea of the ripple on the waters may be present to the eye. And the form of the lake should be irregular, curving round from its base among the lower hills, deeper and still deeper into some close nook up among the mountains from which its head waters spring. It is thus that a lake should be seen, and it was thus that Hawes Water was seen by them from the flat stone on the side of Swindale Fell. The basin of the lake has formed itself into the shape of the figure of 3, and the top section of the figure lies em-

bosomed among the very wildest of the Westmoreland mountains. Altogether it is not above three miles long, and every point of it was to be seen from the spot on which the girls sat themselves down. The water beneath was still as death, and as dark,—and looked almost as cold. But the slow clouds were passing over it, and the shades of darkness on its surface changed themselves with gradual changes. And though no movement was visible, there was ever and again in places a slight sheen upon the lake, which indicated the ripple made by the breeze.

"I 'm so glad I 've come here," said Alice, seating herself. "I cannot bear the idea of coming to Vavasor without seeing one of the lakes at least."

"We 'll get over to Windermere one day," said Kate.

"I don't think we shall. I don't think it possible that I should stay long. Kate, I 've got a letter to show you." And there was that in the tone of her voice which instantly put Kate upon her mettle.

Kate seated herself also, and put up her hand for the letter. "Is it from Mr. Grey?" she asked.

"No," said Alice; "it is not from Mr. Grey." And she gave her companion the paper. Kate before she had touched it had seen that it was from her brother George; and as she opened it looked anxiously into Alice's face. "Has he offended you?" Kate asked.

"Read it," said Alice, "and then we 'll talk of it afterwards,—as we go home." Then she got up from the stone and walked a step or two towards the brow of the fell, and stood there looking down upon the lake, while Kate read the letter. "Well!" she said, when she returned to her place.

"Well," said Kate. "Alice, Alice, it will, indeed, be well if you listen to him. Oh, Alice, may I hope? Alice, my own Alice, my darling, my friend! Say that it shall be so." And Kate knelt at her friend's feet upon the heather, and looked up into her face with eyes full of tears. What shall we say of a woman who could be as false as she had been, and yet could be so true?

Alice made no immediate answer, but still continued to gaze down over her friend upon the lake. "Alice," continued Kate, "I did not think I should be made so happy this Christmas Day. You could not have the heart to bring me here and show me his letter in this way, and bid me read it so calmly, and then tell me that it is all for nothing. No; you could not do that? Alice, I am so happy. I will so love this place. I hated it before." And then she put her face down upon the boulder-stone and kissed it. Still Alice said nothing, but she began to feel that she had gone further than she had intended. It was almost impossible for her now to say that her answer to George must be a refusal.

Then Kate again went on speaking. "But is it not a beautiful letter? Say, Alice,—is it not a letter of which if you were his brother you would feel proud if another girl had shown it to you? I do feel proud of him. I know that he is a man with a manly heart and manly courage, who will yet do manly things. Here out on the mountain, with nobody near us, with Nature all round us, I ask you on your solemn word as a woman, do you love him?"

"Love him!" said Alice.

"Yes;—love him: as a woman should love her

husband. Is not your heart his? Alice, there need be no lies now. If it be so, it should be your glory to say so, here, to me, as you hold that letter in your hand."

"I can have no such glory, Kate. I have ever loved my cousin;—but not so passionately as you seem to think."

"Then there can be no passion in you."

"Perhaps not, Kate. I would sometimes hope that it is so. But come; we shall be late; and you will be cold sitting there."

"I would sit here all night to be sure that your answer would be as I would have it. But, Alice, at any rate you shall tell me before I move what your answer is to be. I know you will not refuse him; but make me happy by saying so with your own lips."

"I cannot tell you before you move, Kate."

"And why not?"

"Because I have not as yet resolved."

"Ah, that is impossible. That is quite impossible. On such a subject and under such circumstances a woman must resolve at the first moment. You had resolved, I know, before you had half read the letter;—though, perhaps, it may not suit you to say so."

"You are quite mistaken. Come along and let us walk, and I will tell you all." Then Kate arose, and they turned their backs to the lake, and began to make their way homewards. "I have not made up my mind as to what answer I will give him; but I have shown you his letter in order that I might have some one with whom I might speak openly. I knew well how it would be, and that you would strive to hurry me into an immediate promise."

"No;—no; I want nothing of the kind."

"But yet I could not deny myself the comfort of your friendship."

"No, Alice, I will not hurry you. I will do nothing that you do not wish. But you cannot be surprised that I should be very eager. Has it not been the longing of all my life? Have I not passed my time plotting and planning and thinking of it till I have had time to think of nothing else? Do you not know what I suffered when, through George's fault, the engagement was broken off? Was it not martyrdom to me,—that horrid time in which your Crichton from Cambridgeshire was in the ascendant? Did I not suffer the tortures of purgatory while that went on;—and yet, on the whole, did I not bear them with patience? And, now, can you be surprised that I am wild with joy when I begin to see that everything will be as I wish;—for it will be as I wish, Alice. It may be that you have not resolved to accept him. But you would have resolved to refuse him instantly had that been your destined answer to his letter." There was but little more said between them on the subject as they were passing over the fell, but when they were going down the path through the Beacon Wood, Kate again spoke: "You will not answer him without speaking to me first?" said Kate.

"I will, at any rate, not send my answer without telling you," said Alice.

"And you will let me see it?"

"Nay," said Alice; "I will not promise that. But if it is unfavourable I will show it you."

"Then I shall never see it," said Kate, laughing. "But that is quite enough for me. I by no means

wish to criticise the love-sweet words in which you tell him that his offences are all forgiven. I know how sweet they will be. Oh, heavens! how I envy him!"

Then they were at home; and the old man met them at the front door, glowering at them angrily from out his old leonine eyes, because the roast beef was already roasted. He had his great uncouth silver watch in his hand, which was always a quarter of an hour too fast, and he pointed at it fiercely, showing them the minute hand at ten minutes past the hour.

"But, grandpapa, you are always too fast," said Kate.

"And you are always too slow, miss," said the hungry old squire.

"Indeed it is not five yet. Is it, Alice?"

"And how long are you going to be dressing?"

"Not ten minutes;—are we, Alice? And, grandpapa, pray don't wait."

"Don't wait! That 's what they always say," he muttered peevishly. "As if one would be any better waiting for them after the meat is on the table." But neither Kate nor Alice heard this, as they were already in their rooms.

Nothing more was said that evening between Alice and Kate about the letter; but Kate, as she wished her cousin good night inside her bedroom door, spoke to her just one word—"Pray for him to-night," she said, "as you pray for those you love best." Alice made no answer, but we may believe that she did as she was desired to do.

CHAPTER VI.

CONTAINING AN ANSWER TO THE LOVE-LETTER.

Alice had had a week allowed to her to write her answer; but she sent it off before the full week was past. "Why should I keep him in suspense?" she said. "If it is to be so, there can be no good in not saying so at once." Then she thought, also, that if this were to be her destiny it might be well for Mr. Grey that all his doubts on the matter should be dispelled. She had treated him badly,—very badly. She had so injured him that the remembrance of the injury must always be a source of misery to her; but she owed to him above everything to let him know what were her intentions as soon as they were settled. She tried to console herself by thinking that the wound to him would be easy of cure. "He also is not passionate," she said. But in so saying she deceived herself. He was a man in whom Love could be very passionate;—and was, moreover, one in whom Love could hardly be renewed.

Each morning Kate asked her whether her answer was written; and on the third day after Christmas, just before dinner, Alice said that she had written it, and that it was gone.

"But it is n't post-day," said Kate;—for the post illuminated Vavasor but three days a week.

"I have given a boy sixpence to take it to Shap," said Alice, blushing.

"And what have you said?" asked Kate, taking hold of the other's arm.

"I have kept my promise," said Alice; "and do you keep yours by asking no further questions."

"My sister,—my own sister," said Kate. And then, as Alice met her embrace, there was no longer any doubt as to the nature of the reply.

After this there was of course much close discussion between them as to what other steps should now be taken. Kate wanted her cousin to write immediately to Mr. Grey, and was somewhat frightened when Alice declined to do so till she had received a further letter from George. "You have not proposed any horrid stipulations to him?" exclaimed Kate.

"I don't know what you may call horrid stipulations," said Alice gravely. "My conditions have not been very hard, and I do not think you would have disapproved them."

"But he!—He is so impetuous! Will he disapprove them?"

"I have told him—— But, Kate, this is just what I did not mean to tell you."

"Why should there be secrets between us?" said Kate.

"There shall be none, then. I have told him that I cannot bring myself to marry him instantly;—that he must allow me twelve months to wear off, if I can in that time, much of sadness and of self-reproach which has fallen to my lot."

"Twelve months, Alice?"

"Listen to me. I have said so. But I have told

him also that if he wishes it still, I will at once tell papa and grandpapa that I hold myself as engaged to him, so that he may know that I bind myself to him as far as it is possible that I should do so. And I have added something else, Kate," she continued to say after a slight pause,—"something else which I can tell you, though I could tell it to no other person. I can tell you because you would do, and will do the same. I have told him that any portion of my money is at his service which may be needed for his purposes before that twelve months is over."

"Oh, Alice! No;—no. You shall not do that. It is too generous." And Kate perhaps felt at the moment that her brother was a man to whom such an offer could hardly be made with safety.

"But I have done it. Mercury, with sixpence in his pocket, is already posting my generosity at Shap. And, to tell the truth, Kate, it is no more than fair. He has honestly told me that while the old squire lives he will want my money to assist him in a career of which I do much more than approve. It has been my earnest wish to see him in Parliament. It will now be the most earnest desire of my heart;—the one thing as to which I shall feel an intense anxiety. How then can I have the face to bid him wait twelve months for that which is specially needed in six months' time? It would be like the workhouses which are so long in giving bread, that in the meantime the wretches starve."

"But the wretch shan't starve," said Kate. "My money, small as it is, will carry him over this bout. I have told him that he shall have it, and that I expect him to spend it. Moreover, I have no doubt that Aunt Greenow would lend me what he wants."

"But I should not wish him to borrow from Aunt Greenow. She would advance him the money, as you say, upon stamped paper, and then talk of it."

"He shall have mine," said Kate.

"And who are you?" said Alice, laughing. "You are not going to be his wife?"

"He shall not touch your money till you are his wife," said Kate, very seriously. "I wish you would consent to change your mind about this stupid tedious year, and then you might do as you pleased. I have no doubt such a settlement might be made as to the property here, when my grandfather hears of it, as would make you ultimately safe."

"And do you think I care to be ultimately safe, as you call it? Kate, my dear, you do not understand me."

"I suppose not. And yet I thought that I had known something about you."

"It is because I do not care for the safety of which you speak that I am now going to become your brother's wife. Do you suppose that I do not see that I must run much risk?"

"You prefer the excitement of London to the tranquillity, may I say, of Cambridgeshire."

"Exactly;—and therefore I have told George that he shall have my money whenever he wants it."

Kate was very persistent in her objection to this scheme till George's answer came. His answer to Alice was accompanied by a letter to his sister, and after that Kate said nothing more about the money question. She said no more then; but it must not therefore be supposed that she was less determined than she had been that no part of Alice's fortune

should be sacrificed to her brother's wants;—at any rate before Alice should become her brother's wife. But her brother's letter for the moment stopped her mouth. It would be necessary that she should speak to him before she again spoke to Alice.

In what words Alice had written her assent it will be necessary that the reader should know, in order that something may be understood of the struggle which she made upon the occasion; but they shall be given presently, when I come to speak of George Vavasor's position as he received them. George's reply was very short and apparently very frank. He deprecated the delay of twelve months, and still hoped to be able to induce her to be more lenient to him. He advised her to write to Mr. Grey at once,—and as regarded the squire he gave her carte blanche to act as she pleased. If the squire required any kind of apology, expression of sorrow,—any asking for pardon, or such like, he, George, would, under the circumstances as they now existed, comply with the requisition most willingly. He would regard it as a simple form, made necessary by his coming marriage. As to Alice's money, he thanked her heartily for her confidence. If the nature of his coming contest at Chelsea should make it necessary, he would use her offer as frankly as it had been made. Such was his letter to Alice. What was contained in his letter to Kate, Alice never knew.

Then came the business of telling this new love tale,—the third which poor Alice had been forced to tell her father and grandfather;—and a grievous task it was. In this matter she feared her father much more than her grandfather, and therefore she resolved to tell her grandfather first;—or, rather, she determined that

she would tell the squire, and that in the meantime Kate should talk to her father.

"Grandpapa," she said to him the morning after she had received her cousin's second letter.—The old man was in the habit of breakfasting alone in a closet of his own, which was called his dressing-room, but in which he kept no appurtenances for dressing, but in lieu of them a large collection of old spuds and sticks and horse's-bits. There was a broken spade here, and a hoe or two; and a small table in the corner was covered with the debris of tradesmen's bills from Penrith, and dirty scraps which he was wont to call his farm accounts.—"Grandpapa," said Alice, rushing away at once into the middle of her subject, "you told me the other day that you thought I ought to be—married."

"Did I, my dear? Well, yes; so I did. And so you ought; I mean to that Mr. Grey."

"That is impossible, sir."

"Then what 's the use of your coming and talking to me about it?"

This made Alice's task not very easy; but, nevertheless, she persevered. "I am come, grandpapa, to tell you of another engagement."

"Another!" said he. And by the tone of his voice he accused his granddaughter of having a larger number of favoured suitors than ought to fall to the lot of any young lady. It was very hard upon her, but still she went on.

"You know," said she, "that some years ago I was to have been married to my cousin George;"—and then she paused.

"Well," said the old man.

"And I remember you told me then that you were much pleased."

"So I was. George was doing well then; or,—which is more likely,—had made us believe that he was doing well. Have you made it up with him again?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that 's the meaning of your jilting Mr. Grey, is it?"

Poor Alice! It is hard to explain how heavy a blow fell upon her from the open utterance of that word! Of all words in the language it was the one which she now most dreaded. She had called herself a jilt, with that inaudible voice which one uses in making self-accusations;—but hitherto no lips had pronounced the odious word to her ears. Poor Alice! She was a jilt; and perhaps it may have been well that the old man should tell her so.

"Grandpapa!" she said; and there was that in the tone of her voice which somewhat softened the squire's heart.

"Well, my dear, I don't want to be ill-natured. So you are going at last to marry George, are you? I hope he 'll treat you well; that 's all. Does your father approve of it?"

"I have told you first, sir;—because I wish to obtain your consent to seeing George again here as your grandson."

"Never," said the old man, snarling;—"never!"

"If he has been wrong, he will beg your pardon."

"If he has been wrong! Did n't he want to squander every shilling of the property,—property which has never belonged to him;—property which I

could give to Tom, Dick, or Harry to-morrow, if I liked?—if he has been wrong!"

"I am not defending him, sir;—but I thought that, perhaps, on such an occasion as this——"

"A Tom Fool's occasion! You 've got money of your own. He 'll spend all that now."

"He will be less likely to do so if you will recognise him as your heir. Pray believe, sir, that he is not the sort of man that he was."

"He must be a very clever sort of a man, I think, when he has talked you out of such a husband as John Grey. It 's astounding to me,—with that ugly mug of his! Well, my dear, if your father approves of it, and if George will ask my pardon,—but I don't think he ever will——"

"He will, sir. I am his messenger for as much as that."

"Oh, you are, are you? Then you may also be my messenger to him, and tell him that, for your sake, I will let him come back here. I know he 'll insult me the first day; but I 'll try and put up with it,—for your sake, my dear. Of course I must know what your father thinks about it."

It may be imagined that Kate's success was even less than that which Alice achieved. "I knew it would be so," said John Vavasor, when his niece first told him;—and as he spoke he struck his hand upon the table. "I knew all along how it would be."

"And why should it not be so, Uncle John?"

"He is your brother, and I will not tell you why."

"You think that he is a spendthrift?"

"I think that he is as unsafe a man as ever I knew to be intrusted with the happiness of any young woman. That is all."

"You are hard upon him, uncle."

"Perhaps so. Tell Alice this from me,—that as I have never yet been able to get her to think anything of my opinion, I do not at all expect that I shall be able to induce her to do so now. I will not even make the attempt. As my son-in-law I will not receive George Vavasor. Tell Alice that."

Alice was told her father's message; but Kate in telling it felt no deep regret. She well knew that Alice would not be turned back from her present intention by her father's wishes. Nor would it have been very reasonable that she should. Her father had for many years relieved himself from the burden of a father's cares, and now had hardly the right to claim a father's privileges.

We will now go once again to George Vavasor's room in Cecil Street, in which he received Alice's letter. He was dressing when it was first brought to him; and when he recognised the handwriting he put it down on his toilet-table unopened. He put it down, and went on brushing his hair, as though he were determined to prove to himself that he was indifferent as to the tidings which it might contain. He went on brushing his hair, and cleaning his teeth, and tying his cravat carefully over his turned-down collar, while the unopened letter lay close to his hand. Of course he was thinking of it,—of course he was anxious,—of course his eye went to it from moment to moment. But he carried it with him into the sitting-room still unopened, and so it remained until after the girl had brought him his tea and his toast. "And now," said he, as he threw himself into his arm-chair, "let us see

what the girl of my heart says to me." The girl of his heart said to him as follows:—

"My dear George,—I feel great difficulty in answering your letter. Could I have my own way, I should make no answer to it at present, but leave it for the next six months, so that then such answer might hereafter be made as circumstances should seem to require. This will be little flattering to you, but it is less flattering to myself. Whatever answer I may make, how can anything in this affair be flattering either to you or to me? We have been like children who have quarrelled over our game of play, till now, at the close of our little day of pleasure, we are fain to meet each other in tears, and acknowledge that we have looked for delights where no delights were to be found.

"Kate, who is here, talks to me of passionate love. There is no such passion left to me;—nor, as I think, to you either. It would not now be possible that you and I should come together on such terms as that. We could not stand up together as man and wife with any hope of a happy marriage, unless we had both agreed that such happiness might be had without passionate love.

"You will see from all this that I do not refuse your offer. Without passion, I have for you a warm affection, which enables me to take a livelier interest in your career than in any other of the matters which are around me. Of course, if I become your wife that interest will be still closer and dearer, and I do feel that I can take in it that concern which a wife should have in her husband's affairs.

"If it suits you, I will become your wife;—but it cannot be quite at once. I have suffered much from the past conflicts of my life, and there has been very much with which I must reproach myself. I know that I have behaved badly. Sometimes I have to undergo the doubly bitter self-accusation of having behaved in a manner which the world will call unfeminine. You must understand that I have not passed through this unscathed, and I must beg you to allow me some time for a cure. A perfect cure I may never expect, but I think that in twelve months from this time I may so far have recovered my usual spirit and ease of mind as to enable me to devote myself to your happiness. Dear George, if you will accept me under such circumstances, I will be your wife, and will endeavour to do my duty by you faithfully.

"I have said that even now, as your cousin, I take a lively interest in your career,—of course I mean your career as a politician,—and especially in your hopes of entering Parliament. I understand accurately, as I think, what you have said about my fortune, and I perfectly appreciate your truth and frankness. If I had nothing of my own you, in your circumstances, could not possibly take me as your wife. I know, moreover, that your need of assistance from my means is immediate rather than prospective. My money may be absolutely necessary to you within this year, during which, as I tell you most truly, I cannot bring myself to become a married woman. But my money shall be less cross-grained than myself. You will take it as frankly as I mean it when I say, that whatever you want for your political purposes shall be forthcoming at your slightest wish. Dear George, let

me have the honour and glory of marrying a man who has gained a seat in the Parliament of Great Britain! Of all positions which a man may attain, that to me is the grandest.

"I shall wait for a further letter from you before I speak either to my father or to my grandfather. If you can tell me that you accede to my views, I will at once try to bring about a reconciliation between you and the squire. I think that that will be almost easier than inducing my father to look with favour upon our marriage. But I need hardly say that should either one or the other oppose it,—or should both do so,—that would not turn me from my purpose.

"I also wait for your answer to write a last line to Mr. Grey.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ALICE VAVASOR."

George Vavasor when he had read the letter threw it carelessly from him on to the breakfast table, and began to munch his toast. He threw it carelessly from him, as though taking a certain pride in his carelessness. "Very well," said he; "so be it. It is probably the best thing that I could do, whatever the effect may be on her." Then he took up his newspaper. But before the day was over he had made many plans,—plans made almost unconsciously,—as to the benefit which might accrue to him from the offer which she had made of her money. And before night he had written that reply to her of which we have heard the contents; and had written also to his sister Kate a letter, of which Kate had kept the contents to herself.

CHAPTER VII.

MONKSHADE.

When the first of the new year came round Lady Glencora was not keeping her appointment at Lady Monk's house. She went to Gatherum Castle, and let us hope that she enjoyed the magnificent Christmas hospitality of the Duke; but when the time came for moving on to Monkshade, she was indisposed, and Mr. Palliser went thither alone. Lady Glencora returned to Matching and remained at home, while her husband was away, in company with the two Miss Pallisers.

When the tidings reached Monkshade that Lady Glencora was not to be expected, Burgo Fitzgerald was already there, armed with such pecuniary assistance as George Vavasor had been able to wrench out of the hands of Mr. Magruin.

"Burgo," said his aunt, catching him one morning near his bedroom door as he was about to go downstairs in hunting trim, "Burgo, your old flame, Lady Glencora, is not coming here."

"Lady Glencora not coming!" said Burgo, betraying by his look and the tone of his voice too clearly that this change in the purpose of a married lady was to him of more importance than it should have been. Such betrayal, however, to Lady Monk was not perhaps matter of much moment.

"No; she is not coming. It can't be matter of any moment to you now."

"But, by heavens, it is," said he, putting his hand up to his forehead, and leaning back against the wall of the passage as though in despair. "It is matter of moment to me. I am the most unfortunate devil that ever lived."

"Fie, Burgo, fie! You must not speak in that way of a married woman. I begin to think it is better that she should not come." At this moment another man booted and spurred came down the passage, upon whom Lady Monk smiled sweetly, speaking some pretty little word as he passed. Burgo spoke never a word, but still stood leaning against the wall, with his hand to his forehead, showing that he had heard something which had moved him greatly. "Come back into your room, Burgo," said his aunt; and they both went in at the door that was nearest to them, for Lady Monk had been on the look-out for him, and had caught him as soon as he appeared in the passage. "If this does annoy you, you should keep it to yourself! What will people say?"

"How can I help what they say?"

"But you would not wish to injure her, I suppose? I thought it best to tell you, for fear you should show any special sign of surprise if you heard of it first in public. It is very weak in you to allow yourself to feel that sort of regard for a married woman. If you cannot constrain yourself I shall be afraid to let you meet her in Brook Street."

Burgo looked for a moment into his aunt's face without answering her, and then turned away towards the door. "You can do as you please about that," said

he; "but you know as well as I do what I have made up my mind to do."

"Nonsense, Burgo; I know nothing of the kind. But do you go downstairs to breakfast, and don't look like that when you go among the people there."

Lady Monk was a woman now about fifty years of age, who had been a great beauty, and who was still handsome in her advanced age. Her figure was very good. She was tall and of fine proportion, though by no means verging to that state of body which our excellent American friend and critic Mr. Hawthorne has described as beefy and has declared to be the general condition of English ladies of Lady Monk's age. Lady Monk was not beefy. She was a comely, handsome, upright dame,—one of whom, as regards her outward appearance, England might be proud,—and of whom Sir Cosmo Monk was very proud. She had come of the family of the Worcestershire Fitzgeralds, of whom it used to be said that there never was one who was not beautiful and worthless. Looking at Lady Monk, you would hardly think that she could be a worthless woman; but there were one or two who professed to know her, and who declared that she was a true scion of the family to which she belonged;—that even her husband's ample fortune had suffered from her extravagance, that she had quarrelled with her only son, and had succeeded in marrying her daughter to the greatest fool in the peerage. She had striven very hard to bring about a marriage between her nephew and the great heiress, and was a woman not likely to pardon those who had foiled her.

At this moment Burgo felt very certain that his aunt was aware of his purpose, and could not forgive her

for pretending to be innocent of it. In this he was most ungrateful, as well as unreasonable,—and very indiscreet also. Had he been a man who ever reflected he must have known that such a woman as his aunt could only assist him as long as she might be presumed to be ignorant of his intention. But Burgo never reflected. The Fitzgeralds never reflected till they were nearer forty than thirty, and then people began to think worse of them than they had thought before.

When Burgo reached the dining-room there were many men there, but no ladies. Sir Cosmo Monk, a fine bald-headed hale man of about sixty, was standing up at the sideboard, cutting a huge game pie. He was a man also who did not reflect much, but who contrived to keep straight in his course through the world without much reflection. "Palliser is coming without her," he said in his loud clear voice, thinking nothing of his wife's nephew. "She 's ill, she says."

"I 'm sorry for it," said one man. "She 's a deal the better fellow of the two."

"She has twice more go in her than Planty Pall," said another.

"Planty is no fool, I can tell you," said Sir Cosmo, coming to the table with his plate full of pie. "We think he 's about the most rising man we have." Sir Cosmo was the member for his county, and was a liberal. He had once, when a much younger man, been at the Treasury, and had since always spoken of the whig Government as though he himself were in some sort a part of it.

"Burgo, do you hear that Palliser is coming without his wife?" said one man,—a very young man, who hardly knew what had been the circumstances of the

case. The others, when they saw Burgo enter, had been silent on the subject of Lady Glencora.

"I have heard,—and be d——d to him," said Burgo. Then there was suddenly a silence in the room, and every one seemed to attend assiduously to his breakfast. It was very terrible, this clear expression of a guilty meaning with reference to the wife of another man! Burgo regarded neither his plate nor his cup, but thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, sat back in his chair with the blackness as of a thunder cloud upon his brow.

"Burgo, you had better eat your breakfast," said Sir Cosmo.

"I don't want any breakfast." He took, however, a bit of toast, and crumbling it up in his hand as he put a morsel into his mouth, went away to the sideboard and filled for himself a glass of cherry brandy.

"If you don't eat any breakfast the less of that you take the better," said Sir Cosmo.

"I 'm all right now," said he, and coming back to the table, went through some form of making a meal with a roll and a cup of tea.

They who were then present used afterwards to say that they should never forget that breakfast. There had been something, they declared, in the tone of Burgo's voice when he uttered his curse against Mr. Palliser, which had struck them all with dread. There had, too, they said, been a blackness in his face, so terrible to be seen, that it had taken from them all the power of conversation. Sir Cosmo, when he had broken the ominous silence, had done so with a manifest struggle. The loud clatter of glasses with which Burgo had swallowed his dram, as though resolved to

show that he was regardless who might know that he was drinking, added to the feeling. It may easily be understood that there was no further word spoken at that breakfast-table about Planty Pall or his wife.

On that day Burgo Fitzgerald startled all those who saw him by the mad way in which he rode. Early in the day there was no excuse for any such rashness. The hounds went from wood to wood, and men went in troops along the forest sides as they do on such occasions. But Burgo was seen to cram his horse at impracticable places, and to ride at gates and rails as though resolved to do himself and his uncle's steed a mischief. This was so apparent that some friend spoke to Sir Cosmo Monk about it. "I can do nothing," said Sir Cosmo. "He is a man whom no one's words will control. Something has ruffled him this morning, and he must run his chance till he becomes quiet." In the afternoon there was a good run, and Burgo again rode as hard as he could make his horse carry him;—but then there was the usual excuse for hard riding; and such riding in a straight run is not dangerous, as it is when the circumstances of the occasion do not warrant it. But, be that as it may, Burgo went on to the end of the day without accident, and as he went home, assured Sir Cosmo, in a voice which was almost cheery, that his mare Spinster was by far the best thing in the Monkshade stables. Indeed Spinster made quite a character that day, and was sold at the end of the season for three hundred guineas on the strength of it. I am, however, inclined to believe that there was nothing particular about the mare. Horses always catch the temperament of their riders, and when a man wishes to break his neck he will generally find a horse

willing to assist him in appearance, but able to save him in the performance. Burgo, at any rate, did not break his neck, and appeared at the dinner-table in a better humour than that which he had displayed in the morning.

On the day appointed Mr. Palliser reached Monkshade. He was, in a manner, canvassing for the support of the liberal party, and it would not have suited him to show any indifference to the invitation of so influential a man as Sir Cosmo. Sir Cosmo had a little party of his own in the House, consisting of four or five other respectable country gentleman, who troubled themselves little with thinking, and who mostly had bald heads. Sir Cosmo was a man with whom it was quite necessary that such an aspirant as Mr. Palliser should stand well, and therefore Mr. Palliser came to Monkshade, although Lady Glencora was unable to accompany him.

"We are so sorry," said Lady Monk. "We have been looking forward to having Lady Glencora with us beyond everything."

Mr. Palliser declared that Lady Glencora herself was overwhelmed with grief in that she should have been debarred from making this special visit. She had, however, been so unwell at Gatherum, the anxious husband declared, as to make it unsafe for her to go again away from home.

"I hope it is nothing serious," said Lady Monk, with a look of grief so well arranged that any stranger would have thought that all the Pallisers must have been very dear to her heart. Then Mr. Palliser went on to explain that Lady Glencora had unfortunately been foolish. During one of those nights of hard frost she

had gone out among the ruins at Matching to show them by moonlight to a friend. The friend had thoughtlessly, foolishly, and in a manner which Mr. Palliser declared to be very reprehensible, allowed Lady Glencora to remain among the ruins till she had caught cold.

"How very wrong!" said Lady Monk with considerable emphasis.

"It was very wrong," said Mr. Palliser, speaking of poor Alice almost maliciously. "However, she caught a cold which, unfortunately, has become worse at my uncle's, and so I was obliged to take her home."

Lady Monk perceived that Mr. Palliser had in truth left his wife behind because he believed her to be ill, and not because he was afraid of Burgo Fitzgerald. So accomplished a woman as Lady Monk felt no doubt that the wife's absence was caused by fear of the lover, and not by any cold caught in viewing ruins by moonlight. She was not to be deceived in such a matter. But she became aware that Mr. Palliser had been deceived. As she was right in this we must go back for a moment, and say a word of things as they went on at Matching after Alice Vavasor had left that place.

Alice had told Miss Palliser that steps ought to be taken, whatever might be their cost, to save Lady Glencora from the peril of a visit to Monkshade. To this Miss Palliser had assented, and, when she left Alice, was determined to tell Mr. Palliser the whole story. But when the time for doing so had come, her courage failed her. She could not find words in which to warn the husband that his wife would not be safe in the company of her old lover. The task with Lady Glencora herself, bad as that would be, might be

easier, and this task she at last undertook,—not without success.

"Glencora," she said, when she found a fitting opportunity, "you won't be angry, I hope, if I say a word to you?"

"That depends very much upon what the word is," said Lady Glencora. And here it must be acknowledged that Mr. Palliser's wife had not done much to ingratiate herself with Mr. Palliser's cousins;—not perhaps so much as she should have done, seeing that she found them in her husband's house. She had taught herself to think that they were hard, stiff, and too proud of bearing the name of Palliser. Perhaps some little attempt may have been made by one or both of them to teach her something, and it need hardly be said that such an attempt on the part of a husband's unmarried female relations would not be forgiven by a young bride. She had undoubtedly been ungracious, and of this Miss Palliser was well aware.

"Well,—the word shall be as little unpleasant as I can make it," said Miss Palliser, already appreciating fully the difficulty of her task.

"But why say anything that is unpleasant? However, if it is to be said, let us have it over at once."

"You are going to Monkshade, I believe, with Plantagenet?"

"Well;—and what of that?"

"Dear Glencora, I think you had better not go. Do you not think so yourself?"

"Who has been talking to you?" said Lady Glencora, turning upon her very sharply.

"Nobody has been talking to me;—not in the sense you mean."

"Plantagenet has spoken to you?"

"Not a word," said Miss Palliser. "You may be sure that he would not utter a word on such a subject to any one unless it were to yourself. But, dear Glencora, you should not go there;—I mean it in all kindness and love,—I do indeed." Saying this she offered her hand to Glencora, and Glencora took it.

"Perhaps you do," said she in a low voice.

"Indeed I do. The world is so hard and cruel in what it says."

"I do not care two straws for what the world says."

"But he might care."

"It is not my fault. I do not want to go to Monkshade. Lady Monk was my friend once, but I do not care if I never see her again. I did not arrange this visit. It was Plantagenet who did it."

"But he will not take you there if you say you do not wish it."

"I have said so, and he told me that I must go. You will hardly believe me,—but I condescended even to tell him why I thought it better to remain away. He told me, in answer, that it was a silly folly which I must live down, and that it did not become me to be afraid of any man."

"Of course you are not afraid, but——"

"I am afraid. That is just the truth. I am afraid;—but what can I do more than I have done?"

This was very terrible to Miss Palliser. She had not thought that Lady Glencora would say so much, and she felt a true regret in having been made to hear words which so nearly amounted to a confession. But for this there was no help now. There were not many more words between them, and we already know the

result of the conversation. Lady Glencora became so ill from the effects of her imprudent lingering among the ruins that she was unable to go to Monkshade.

Mr. Palliser remained three days at Monkshade, and cemented his political alliance with Sir Cosmo much in the same way as he had before done with the Duke of St. Bungay. There was little or nothing said about politics, and certainly not a word that could be taken as any definite party understanding between the men; but they sat at dinner together at the same table, drank a glass of wine or two out of the same decanters, and dropped a chance word now and again about the next session of Parliament. I do not know that anything more had been expected either by Mr. Palliser or by Sir Cosmo; but it seemed to be understood when Mr. Palliser went away that Sir Cosmo was of opinion that that young scion of a ducal house ought to become the future Chancellor of the Exchequer in the whig Government.

"I can't see that there 's so much in him," said one young member of Parliament to Sir Cosmo.

"I rather think that there is, all the same," said the baronet. "There 's a good deal in him, I believe! I dare say he 's not very bright, but I don't know that we want brightness. A bright financier is the most dangerous man in the world. We 've had enough of that already. Give me sound common sense, with just enough of the gab in a man to enable him to say what he 's got to say! We don't want more than that now-a-days." From which it became evident that Sir Cosmo was satisfied with the new political candidate for high place.

Lady Monk took an occasion to introduce Mr. Pal-

liser to Burgo Fitzgerald; with what object it is difficult to say, unless she was anxious to make mischief between the men. Burgo scowled at him; but Mr. Palliser did not notice the scowl, and put out his hand to his late rival most affably. Burgo was forced to take it, and as he did so made a little speech. "I 'm sorry that we have not the pleasure of seeing Lady Glencora with you," said he.

"She is unfortunately indisposed," said Mr. Palliser.

"I am sorry for it," said Burgo,—"very sorry indeed." Then he turned on his heel and walked away. The few words he had spoken, and the manner in which he had carried himself, had been such as to make all those around them notice it. Each of them knew that Lady Glencora's name should not have been in Burgo's mouth, and all felt a fear not easily to be defined that something terrible would come of it. But Mr. Palliser himself did not seem to notice anything; or to fear anything; and nothing terrible did come of it during that visit of his to Monkshade.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. VAVASOR SPEAKS TO HIS DAUGHTER.

Alice Vavasor returned to London with her father, leaving Kate at Vavasor Hall with her grandfather. The journey was not a pleasant one. Mr. Vavasor knew that it was his duty to do something,—to take some steps with the view of preventing the marriage which his daughter meditated, but he did not know what that something should be, and he did know that, whatever it might be, the doing of it would be thoroughly disagreeable. When they started from Vavasor he had as yet hardly spoken to her a word upon the subject. "I cannot congratulate you," he had simply said. "I hope the time may come, papa, when you will," Alice had answered; and that had been all.

The squire had promised that he would consent to a reconciliation with his grandson, if Alice's father would express himself satisfied with the proposed marriage. John Vavasor had certainly expressed nothing of the kind. "I think so badly of him," he had said, speaking to the old man of George, "that I would rather know that almost any other calamity was to befall her, than that she should be united to him." Then the squire, with his usual obstinacy, had taken up the cudgels on behalf of his grandson; and had tried to prove that the match after all would not be so bad in its results as his son seemed to expect. "It would do

very well for the property," he said. "I would settle the estate on their eldest son, so that he could not touch it; and I don't see why he should n't reform as well as another." John Vavasor had then declared that George was thoroughly bad, that he was an adventurer; that he believed him to be a ruined man, and that he would never reform. The squire upon this had waxed angry, and in this way George obtained aid and assistance down at the old house, which he certainly had no right to expect. When Alice wished her grandfather good-bye the old man gave her a message to his grandson. "You may tell him," said he, "that I will never see him again unless he begs my pardon for his personal bad conduct to me, but that if he marries you, I will take care that the property is properly settled upon his child and yours. I shall always be glad to see you, my dear; and for your sake, I will see him if he will humble himself to me." There was no word spoken then about her father's consent; and Alice, when she left Vavasor, felt that the squire was rather her friend than her enemy in regard to this thing which she contemplated. That her father was and would be an uncompromising enemy to her,—uncompromising though probably not energetical,—she was well aware; and, therefore, the journey up to London was not comfortable.

Alice had resolved, with great pain to herself, that in this matter she owed her father no obedience. "There cannot be obedience on one side," she said to herself, "without protection and support on the other." Now it was quite true that John Vavasor had done little in the way of supporting or protecting his daughter. Early in life, before she had resided under

the same roof with him in London, he had, as it were, washed his hands of all solicitude regarding her; and having no other ties of family, had fallen into habits of life which made it almost impossible for him to live with her as any other father would live with his child. Then, when there first sprang up between them that manner of sharing the same house without any joining together of their habits of life, he had excused himself to himself by saying that Alice was unlike other girls, and that she required no protection. Her fortune was her own, and at her own disposal. Her character was such that she showed no inclination to throw the burden of such disposal on her father's shoulders. She was steady, too, and given to no pursuits which made it necessary that he should watch closely over her. She was a girl, he thought, who could do as well without surveillance as with it,—as well, or perhaps better. So it had come to pass that Alice had been the free mistress of her own actions, and had been left to make the most she could of her own hours. It cannot be supposed that she had eaten her lonely dinners in Queen Anne Street night after night, week after week, month after month, without telling herself that her father was neglecting her. She could not perceive that he spent every evening in society, but never an evening in her society, without feeling that the tie between her and him was not the strong bond which usually binds a father to his child. She was well aware that she had been ill-used in being thus left desolate in her home. She had uttered no word of complaint; but she had learned, without being aware that she was doing so, to entertain a firm resolve that her father should not guide her in her path through life. In that affair of John

Grey they had both for a time thought alike, and Mr. Vavasor had believed that his theory with reference to Alice had been quite correct. She had been left to herself, and was going to dispose of herself in a way than which nothing could be more eligible. But evil days were now coming, and Mr. Vavasor, as he travelled up to London, with his daughter seated opposite to him in the railway carriage, felt that now, at last, he must interfere. In part of the journey they had the carriage to themselves, and Mr. Vavasor thought that he would begin what he had to say; but he put it off till others joined them, and then there was no further opportunity for such conversation as that which would be necessary between them. They reached home about eight in the evening, having dined on the road. "She will be tired to-night," he said to himself, as he went off to his club, "and I will speak to her to-morrow." Alice specially felt his going on this evening. When two persons have had together the tedium of such a journey as that from Westmoreland up to London, there should be some feeling between them to bind them together while enjoying the comfort of the evening. Had he stayed and sat with her at her tea-table, Alice would at any rate have endeavoured to be soft with him in any discussion that might have been raised; but he went away from her at once, leaving her to think alone over the perils of the life before her. "I want to speak to you after breakfast to-morrow," he said as he went out. Alice answered that she should be there,—as a matter of course. She scorned to tell him that she was always there,—always alone at home. She had never uttered a word of complaint, and she would not begin now.

The discussion after breakfast the next day was commenced with formal and almost ceremonial preparation. The father and daughter breakfasted together, with the knowledge that the discussion was coming. It did not give to either of them a good appetite, and very little was said at table.

"Will you come upstairs?" said Alice, when she perceived that her father had finished his tea.

"Perhaps that will be best," said he. Then he followed her into the drawing-room in which the fire had just been lit.

"Alice," said he, "I must speak to you about this engagement of yours."

"Won't you sit down, papa? It does look so dreadful, your standing up over one in that way." He had placed himself on the rug with his back to the incipient fire, but now, at her request, he sat himself down opposite to her.

"I was greatly grieved when I heard of this at Vavasor."

"I am sorry that you should be grieved, papa."

"I was grieved. I must confess that I never could understand why you treated Mr. Grey as you have done."

"Oh, papa, that 's done and past. Pray let that be among the bygones."

"Does he know yet of your engagement with your cousin?"

"He will know it by this time to-morrow."

"Then I beg of you, as a great favour, to postpone your letter to him." To this Alice made no answer. "I have not troubled you with many such requests, Alice. Will you tell me that this one shall be granted?"

"I think that I owe it to him as an imperative duty to let him know the truth."

"But you may change your mind again." Alice found that this was hard to bear and hard to answer; but there was a certain amount of truth in the grievous reproach conveyed in her father's words, which made her bow her neck to it. "I have no right to say that it is impossible," she replied, in words that were barely audible.

"No;—exactly so," said her father. "And therefore it will be better that you should postpone any such communication."

"For how long do you mean?"

"Till you and I shall have agreed together that he should be told."

"No, papa; I will not consent to that. I consider myself bound to let him know the truth without delay. I have done him a great injury, and I must put an end to that as soon as possible."

"You have done him an injury certainly, my dear; —a very great injury," said Mr. Vavasor, going away from his object about the proposed letter; "and I believe he will feel it as such to the last day of his life, if this goes on."

"I hope not. I believe that it will not be so. I feel sure that it will not be so."

"But of course what I am thinking of now is your welfare,—not his. When you simply told me that you intended to——" Alice winced, for she feared to hear from her father that odious word which her grandfather had used to her; and indeed the word had been on her father's lips, but he had refrained and spared her —"that you intended to break your engagement with

Mr. Grey," he continued, "I said little or nothing to you. I would not ask you to marry any man, even though you had yourself promised to marry him. But when you tell me that you are engaged to your cousin George, that matter is very different. I do not think well of your cousin. Indeed I think anything but well of him. It is my duty to tell you that the world speaks very ill of him." He paused, but Alice remained silent. "When you were about to travel with him," he continued, "I ought perhaps to have told you the same. But I did not wish to pain you or his sister; and, moreover, I have heard worse of him since then,—much worse than I had heard before."

"As you did not tell me before, I think you might spare me now," said Alice.

"No, my dear; I cannot allow you to sacrifice yourself without telling you that you are doing so. If it were not for your money he would never think of marrying you."

"Of that I am well aware," said Alice. "He has told me so himself very plainly."

"And yet you will marry him?"

"Certainly I will. It seems to me, papa, that there is a great deal of false feeling about this matter of money in marriage,—or rather, perhaps, a great deal of pretended feeling. Why should I be angry with a man for wishing to get that for which every man is struggling? At this point of George's career the use of money is essential to him. He could not marry without it."

"You had better then give him your money without yourself," said her father, speaking in irony.

"That is just what I mean to do, papa," said Alice.

"What!" said Mr. Vavasor, jumping up from his seat. "You mean to give him your money before you marry him?"

"Certainly I do;—if he should want it;—or, I should rather say, as much as he may want of it."

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Mr. Vavasor. "Alice, you must be mad."

"To part with my money to my friend?" said she. "It is a kind of madness of which I need not at any rate be ashamed."

"Tell me this, Alice; has he got any of it as yet?"

"Not a shilling. Papa, pray do not look at me like that. If I had no thought of marrying him you would not call me mad because I lent to my cousin what money he might need."

"I should only say that so much of your fortune was thrown away, and if it were not much that would be an end of it. I would sooner see you surrender to him the half of all you have, without any engagement to marry him, than know that he had received a shilling from you under such a promise."

"You are prejudiced against him, sir."

"Was it prejudice that made you reject him once before? Did you condemn him then through prejudice? Had you not ascertained that he was altogether unworthy of you?"

"We were both younger, then," said Alice, speaking very softly, but very seriously. "We were both much younger then, and looked at life with other eyes than those which we now use. For myself I expected much then, which I now seem hardly to regard at all;

and as for him, he was then attached to pleasures to which I believe he has now learned to be indifferent."

"Psha!" ejaculated the father.

"I can only speak as I believe," continued Alice. "And I think I may perhaps know more of his manner of life than you do, papa. But I am prepared to run risks now which I feared before. Even though he were all that you think him to be, I would still endeavour to do my duty to him, and to bring him to other things."

"What is it you expect to get by marrying him?" asked Mr. Vavasor.

"A husband whose mode of thinking is congenial to my own," answered Alice. "A husband who proposes to himself a career in life with which I can sympathise. I think that I may perhaps help my cousin in the career which he has chosen, and that alone is a great reason why I should attempt to do so."

"With your money?" said Mr. Vavasor with a sneer.

"Partly with my money," said Alice, disdaining to answer the sneer. "Though it were only with my money, even that would be something."

"Well, Alice, as your father, I can only implore you to pause before you commit yourself to his hands. If he demands money from you, and you are minded to give it to him, let him have it in moderation. Anything will be better than marrying him. I know that I cannot hinder you; you are as much your own mistress as I am my own master,—or rather a great deal more, as my income depends on my going to that horrid place in Chancery Lane. But yet I suppose you must think something of your father's wishes and

your father's opinion. It will not be pleasant for you to stand at the altar without my being there near you."

To this Alice made no answer; but she told herself that it had not been pleasant to her to have stood at so many places during the last four years,—and to have found herself so often alone,—without her father being near to her. That had been his fault, and it was not now in her power to remedy the ill-effects of it.

"Has any day been fixed between you and him?" he asked.

"No, papa."

"Nothing has been said about that?"

"Yes; something has been said. I have told him that it cannot be for a year yet. It is because I told him that, that I told him also that he should have my money when he wanted it."

"Not all of it?" said Mr. Vavasor.

"I don't suppose he will need it all. He intends to stand again for Chelsea, and it is the great expense of the election which makes him want money. You are not to suppose that he has asked me for it. When I made him understand that I did not wish to marry quite yet, I offered him the use of that which would be ultimately his own."

"And he has accepted it?"

"He answered me just as I had intended,—that when the need came he would take me at my word."

"Then, Alice, I will tell you what is my belief. He will drain you of every shilling of your money, and when that is gone there will be no more heard of the marriage. We must take a small house in some cheap part of the town and live on my income as best we may. I shall go and insure my life, so that you

may not absolutely starve when I die." Having said this, Mr. Vavasor went away, not immediately to the insurance office, as his words seemed to imply, but to his club, where he sat alone, reading the newspaper, very gloomily, till the time came for his afternoon rubber of whist, and the club dinner bill for the day was brought under his eye.

Alice had no such consolations in her solitude. She had fought her battle with her father tolerably well, but she was now called upon to fight a battle with herself, which was one much more difficult to win. Was her cousin, her betrothed as she now must regard him, the worthless, heartless, mercenary rascal which her father painted him? There had certainly been a time, and that not very long distant, in which Alice herself had been almost constrained so to regard him. Since that any change for the better in her opinion of him had been grounded on evidence given either by himself or by his sister Kate. He had done nothing to inspire her with any confidence, unless his reckless daring in coming forward to contest a seat in Parliament could be regarded as a doing of something. And he had owned himself to be a man almost penniless; he had spoken of himself as being utterly reckless,—as being one whose standing in the world was and must continue to be a perch on the edge of a precipice, from which any accident might knock him headlong. Alice believed in her heart that this last profession or trade to which he had applied himself was becoming as nothing to him,—that he received from it no certain income;—no income that a man could make to appear respectable to fathers or guardians when seeking a girl in marriage. Her father de-

clared that all men spoke badly of him. Alice knew her father to be an idle man, a man given to pleasure, to be one who thought by far too much of the good things of the world; but she had never found him to be either false or malicious. His unwonted energy in this matter was in itself evidence that he believed himself to be right in what he said.

To tell the truth, Alice was frightened at what she had done, and almost repented of it already. Her acceptance of her cousin's offer had not come of love; —nor had it, in truth, come chiefly of ambition. She had not so much asked herself why she should do this thing, as why she should not do it,—seeing that it was required of her by her friend. What after all did it matter? That was her argument with herself. It cannot be supposed that she looked back on the past events of her life with any self-satisfaction. There was no self-satisfaction, but in truth there was more self-reproach than she deserved. As a girl she had loved her cousin George passionately, and that love had failed her. She did not tell herself that she had been wrong when she gave him up, but she thought herself to have been most unfortunate in the one necessity. After such an experience as that, would it not have been better for her to have remained without further thought of marriage?

Then came that terrible episode in her life for which she never could forgive herself. She had accepted Mr. Grey because she liked him and honoured him. "And I did love him," she said to herself, now on this morning. Poor, wretched, heart-wrung woman! As she sat there thinking of it all in her solitude she was to be pitied at any rate, if not to be forgiven. Now,

as she thought of Nethercoats, with its quiet life, its gardens, its books, and the peaceful affectionate ascendancy of him who would have been her lord and master, her feelings were very different from those which had induced her to resolve that she would not stoop to put her neck beneath that yoke. Would it not have been well for her to have a master who by his wisdom and strength could save her from such wretched doubtings as these? But she had refused to bend, and then she had found herself desolate and alone in the world.

"If I can do him good why should I not marry him?" In that feeling had been the chief argument which had induced her to return such an answer as she had sent to her cousin. "For myself, what does it matter? As to this life of mine and all that belongs to it, why should I regard it otherwise than to make it of some service to some one who is dear to me?" He had been ever dear to her from her earliest years. She believed in his intellect, even if she could not believe in his conduct. Kate, her friend, longed for this thing. As for that dream of love, it meant nothing; and as for those arguments of prudence,—that cold calculation about her money, which all people seemed to expect from her,—she would throw it to the winds. What if she were ruined! There was always the other chance. She might save him from ruin, and help him to honour and fortune.

But then, when the word was once past her lips, there returned to her that true woman's feeling which made her plead for a long day,—which made her feel that that long day would be all too short,—which made her already dread the coming of the end of the

year. She had said that she would become George Vavasor's wife, but she wished that the saying so might be the end of it. When he came to her to embrace her how should she receive him? The memory of John Grey's last kiss still lingered on her lips. She had told herself that she scorned the delights of love; if it were so, was she not bound to keep herself far from them; if it were so,—would not her cousin's kiss pollute her?

"It may be as my father says," she thought. "It may be that he wants my money only; if so, let him have it. Surely when the year is over I shall know." Then a plan formed itself in her head, which she did not make willingly, with any voluntary action of her mind,—but which came upon her as plans do come,—and recommended itself to her in despite of herself. He should have her money as he might call for it,—all of it excepting some small portion of her income, which might suffice to keep her from burdening her father. Then, if he were contented, he should go free without reproach, and there should be an end of all question of marriage for her.

As she thought of this, and matured it in her mind, the door opened, and the servant announced her cousin George.

CHAPTER IX.

PASSION VERSUS PRUDENCE.

It had not occurred to Alice that her accepted lover would come to her so soon. She had not told him expressly of the day on which she would return, and had not reflected that Kate would certainly inform him. She had been thinking so much of the distant perils of his engagement, that this peril, so sure to come upon her before many days or hours could pass by, had been forgotten. When the name struck her ear, and George's step was heard outside on the landing-place, she felt the blood rush violently to her heart, and she jumped up from her seat panic-stricken and in utter dismay. How should she receive him? And then again, with what form of affection would she be accosted by him? But he was there in the room with her before she had had a moment allowed to her for thought.

She hardly ventured to look up at him; but, nevertheless, she became aware that there was something in his appearance and dress brighter, more lover-like, perhaps newer, than was usual with him. This in itself was an affliction to her. He ought to have understood that such an engagement as theirs not only did not require, but absolutely forbade, any such symptom of young love as this. Even when their marriage came, if it must come, it should come without any

customary sign of smartness, without any outward mark of exultation. It would have been very good in him to have remained away from her for weeks and months; but to come upon her thus, on the first morning of her return, was a cruelty not to be forgiven. These were the feelings with which Alice regarded her betrothed when he came to see her.

"Alice," said he, coming up to her with his extended hand,—"Dearest Alice!"

She gave him her hand, and muttered some word which was even inaudible to him; she gave him her hand, and immediately endeavoured to resume it, but he held it clenched within his own, and she felt that she was his prisoner. He was standing close to her now, and she could not escape from him. She was trembling with fear lest worse might betide her even than this. She had promised to marry him, and now she was covered with dismay as she felt rather than thought how very far she was from loving the man to whom she had given this promise.

"Alice," he said, "I am a man once again. It is only now that I can tell you what I have suffered during these last few years." He still held her hand, but he had not as yet attempted any closer embrace. She knew that she was standing away from him awkwardly, almost showing a repugnance to him; but it was altogether beyond her power to assume an attitude of ordinary ease. "Alice," he continued, "I feel that I am a strong man again, armed to meet the world at all points. Will you not let me thank you for what you have done for me?"

She must speak to him! Though the doing so should be ever so painful to her, she must say some

word to him which should have in it a sound of kindness. After all, it was his undoubted right to come to her, and the footing on which he assumed to stand was simply that which she herself had given to him. It was not his fault if at this moment he inspired her with disgust rather than with love.

"I have done nothing for you, George," she said, "nothing at all." Then she got her hand away from him, and retreated back to a sofa where she seated herself, leaving him still standing in the space before the fire. "That you may do much for yourself is my greatest hope. If I can help you, I will do so most heartily." Then she became thoroughly ashamed of her words, feeling that she was at once offering to him the use of her purse.

"Of course you will help me," he said. "I am full of plans, all of which you must share with me. But now, at this moment, my one great plan is that in which you have already consented to be my partner. Alice, you are my wife now. Tell me that it will make you happy to call me your husband."

Not for worlds could she have said so at this moment. It was ill-judged in him to press her thus. He should already have seen, with half an eye, that no such triumph as that which he now demanded could be his on this occasion. He had had his triumph when, in the solitude of his own room, with quiet sarcasm he had thrown on one side of him the letter in which she had accepted him, as though the matter had been one almost indifferent to him. He had no right to expect the double triumph. Then he had frankly told himself that her money would be useful to him. He should have been contented with that conviction, and not

have required her also to speak to him soft winning words of love.

"That must be still distant, George," she said. "I have suffered so much!"

"And it has been my fault that you have suffered; I know that. These years of misery have been my doing." It was, however, the year of coming misery that was most to be dreaded.

"I do not say that," she replied, "nor have I ever thought it. I have myself and myself only to blame." Here he altogether misunderstood her, believing her to mean that the fault for which she blamed herself had been committed in separating herself from him on that former occasion.

"Alice, dear, let bygones be bygones."

"Bygones will not be bygones. It may be well for people to say so, but it is never true. One might as well say so to one's body as to one's heart. But the hairs will grow grey, and the heart will grow cold."

"I do not see that one follows upon the other," said George. "My hair is growing very grey;"—and to show that it was so, he lifted the dark lock from the side of his forehead, and displayed the incipient grizzling of the hair behind. "If grey hairs make an old man, Alice, you will marry an old husband; but even you shall not be allowed to say that my heart is old."

That word husband, which her cousin had twice used, was painful to Alice's ear. She shrunk from it with palpable bodily suffering. Marry an old husband! His age was nothing to the purpose, though he had been as old as Enoch. But she was again obliged to answer him. "I spoke of my own heart," said she. "I sometimes feel that it has grown very old."

"Alice, that is hardly cheering to me."

"You have come to me too quickly, George, and do not reflect how much there is that I must remember. You have said that bygones should be bygones. Let them be so, at any rate as far as words are concerned. Give me a few months in which I may learn,—not to forget them, for that will be impossible,—but to abstain from speaking of them."

There was something in her look as she spoke, and in the tone of her voice that was very sad. It struck him forcibly, but it struck him with anger rather than with sadness. Doubtless her money had been his chief object when he offered to renew his engagement with her. Doubtless he would have made no such offer had she been penniless, or even had his own need been less pressing. But, nevertheless, he desired something more than money. The triumph of being preferred to John Grey,—of having John Grey sent altogether adrift, in order that his old love might be recovered, would have been too costly a luxury for him to seek, had he not in seeking it been able to combine prudence with the luxury. But though his prudence had been undoubted, he desired the luxury also. It was on a calculation of the combined advantage that he had made his second offer to his cousin. As he would by no means have consented to proceed with the arrangement without the benefit of his cousin's money, so also did he feel unwilling to dispense with some expression of her love for him, which would be to him triumphant. Hitherto in their present interview there had certainly been no expression of her love.

"Alice," he said, "your greeting to me is hardly all that I had hoped."

"Is it not?" said she. "Indeed, George, I am sorry that you should be disappointed; but what can I say? You would not have me affect a lightness of spirit which I do not feel?"

"If you wish," said he, very slowly,—"if you wish to retract your letter to me, you now have my leave to do so."

What an opportunity was this of escape! But she had not the courage to accept it. What girl, under such circumstances, would have had such courage? How often are offers made to us which we would almost give our eyes to accept, but dare not accept because we fear the countenance of the offerer! "I do not wish to retract my letter," said she, speaking as slowly as he had spoken; "but I wish to be left awhile, that I may recover my strength of mind. Have you not heard doctors say, that muscles which have been strained should be allowed rest, or they will never entirely renew their tension? It is so with me now; if I could be quiet for a few months, I think I could learn to face the future with a better courage."

"And is that all you can say to me, Alice?"

"What would you have me say?"

"I would fain hear one word of love from you; is that unreasonable? I would wish to know from your own lips that you have satisfaction in the renewed prospect of our union; is that too ambitious? It might have been that I was over-bold in pressing my suit upon you again; but as you accepted it, have I not a right to expect that you should show me that you have been happy in accepting it?"

But she had not been happy in accepting it. She was not happy now that she had accepted it. She

could not show to him any sign of such joy as that which he desired to see. And now, at this moment, she feared with an excessive fear that there would come some demand for an outward demonstration of love, such as he in his position might have a right to make. She seemed to be aware that this might be prevented only by such demeanour on her part as that which she had practised, and she could not, therefore, be stirred to the expression of any word of affection. She listened to his appeal, and when it was finished she made no reply. If he chose to take her in dudgeon, he must do so. She would make for him any sacrifice that was possible to her, but this sacrifice was not possible.

"And you have not a word to say to me?" he asked. She looked up at him, and saw that the cicature on his face was becoming ominous; his eyes were bent upon her with all their forbidding brilliance, and he was assuming that look of angry audacity which was so peculiar to him, and which had so often cowed those with whom he was brought in contact.

"No other word, at present, George; I have told you that I am not at ease. Why do you press me now?"

He had her letter to him in the breast-pocket of his coat, and his hand was on it, that he might fling it back to her, and tell her that he would not hold her to be his promised wife under such circumstances as these. The anger which would have induced him to do so was the better part of his nature. Three or four years since, this better part would have prevailed, and he would have given way to his rage. But now, as his fingers played upon the paper, he remembered that her

money was absolutely essential to him,—that some of it was needed by him almost instantly,—that on this very morning he was bound to go where money would be demanded from him, and that his hopes with regard to Chelsea could not be maintained unless he was able to make some substantial promise of providing funds. His sister Kate's fortune was just two thousand pounds. That, and no more, was now the capital at his command, if he should abandon this other source of aid. Even that must go, if all other sources should fail him; but he would fain have that untouched, if it were possible. Oh, that that old man in Westmoreland would die and be gathered to his fathers, now that he was full of years and ripe for the sickle! But there was no sign of death about the old man. So his fingers released their hold on the letter, and he stood looking at her in his anger.

"You wish me then to go from you?" he said.

"Do not be angry with me, George!"

"Angry! I have no right to be angry. But, by Heaven, I am wrong there. I have the right, and I am angry. I think you owed it me to give me some warmer welcome. Is it to be thus with us always for the next accursed year?"

"Oh, George!"

"To me it will be accursed. But is it to be thus between us always? Alice, I have loved you above all women. I may say that I have never loved any woman but you; and yet I am sometimes driven to doubt whether you have a heart in you capable of love. After all that has passed, all your old protestations, all my repentance, and your proffer of forgiveness, you should have received me with open arms. I suppose

I may go now, and feel that I have been kicked out of your house like a dog."

"If you speak to me like that, and look at me like that, how can I answer you?"

"I want no answer. I wanted you to put your hand in mine, to kiss me, and to tell me that you are once more my own. Alice, think better of it; kiss me, and let me feel my arm once more round your waist."

She shuddered as she sat, still silent, on her seat, and he saw that she shuddered. With all his desire for her money,—his instant need of it,—this was too much for him; and he turned upon his heel, and left the room without another word. She heard his quick step as he hurried down the stairs, but she did not rise to arrest him. She heard the door slam as he left the house, but still she did not move from her seat. Her immediate desire had been that he should go,—and now he was gone. There was in that a relief which almost comforted her. And this was the man from whom, within the last few days, she had accepted an offer of marriage.

George, when he left the house, walked hurriedly into Cavendish Square, and down along the east side, till he made his way out along Princes Street, into the Circus in Oxford Street. Close to him there, in Great Marlborough Street, was the house of his parliamentary attorney, Mr. Scruby, on whom he was bound to call on that morning. As he had walked away from Queen Anne Street he had thought of nothing but that too visible shudder which his cousin Alice had been unable to repress. He had been feeding on his anger, and indulging it, telling himself at one moment that he would let her and her money go from him whither they

list,—and making inward threats in the next that the time should come in which he would punish her for this ill-usage. But there was the necessity of resolving what he would say to Mr. Scruby. To Mr. Scruby was still due some trifle on the cost of the last election; but even if this were paid, Mr. Scruby would make no heavy advance towards the expense of the next election. Whoever might come out at the end of such affairs without a satisfactory settlement of his little bill, as had for a while been the case with Mr. Grimes, from the Handsome Man,—and as, indeed, still was the case with him, as that note of hand at three months' date was not yet paid,—Mr. Scruby seldom allowed himself to suffer. It was true that the election would not take place till the summer; but there were preliminary expenses which needed ready money. Metropolitan voters, as Mr. Scruby often declared, required to be kept in good humour,—so that Mr. Scruby wanted the present payment of some five hundred pounds, and a well-grounded assurance that he would be put in full funds by the beginning of next June. Even Mr. Scruby might not be true as perfect steel, if he thought that his candidate at the last moment would not come forth properly prepared. Other candidates, with money in their pockets, might find their way into Mr. Scruby's offices. As George Vavasor crossed Regent Street, he gulped down his anger, and applied his mind to business. Should he prepare himself to give orders that Kate's little property should be sold out, or would he resolve to use his cousin's money? That his cousin's money would still be at his disposal, in spite of the stormy mood in which he had retreated from her presence, he felt sure; but the ask-

ing for it on his part would be unpleasant. That duty he must entrust to Kate. But as he reached Mr. Scruby's door, he had decided that for such purposes as those now in hand, it was preferable that he should use his wife's fortune! It was thus that in his own mind he worded the phrase, and made for himself an excuse. Yes;—he would use his wife's fortune, and explain to Mr. Scruby that he would be justified in doing so by the fact that his own heritage would be settled on her at her marriage. I do not suppose that he altogether liked it. He was not, at any rate as yet, an altogether heartless swindler. He could not take his cousin's money without meaning,—without thinking that he meant, to repay her in full all that he took. Her behaviour to him this very morning had no doubt made the affair more difficult to his mind, and more unpleasant than it would have been had she smiled on him; but even as it was, he managed to assure himself that he was doing her no wrong, and with this self-assurance he entered Mr. Scruby's office.

The clerks in the outer office were very civil to him, and undertook to promise him that he should not be kept waiting an instant. There were four gentlemen in the little parlour, they said, waiting to see Mr. Scruby, but there they should remain till Mr. Vavasor's interview was over. One gentleman, as it seemed, was even turned out to make way for him; for as George was ushered into the lawyer's room, a little man, looking very meek, was hurried away from it.

"You can wait, Smithers," said Mr. Scruby, speaking from within. "I shan't be very long." Vavasor apologised to his agent for the injury he was doing Smithers; but Mr. Scruby explained that he was only

a poor devil of a printer, looking for payment of his little amount. He had printed and posted 30,000 placards for one of the late Marylebone candidates, and found some difficulty in getting his money. "You see, when they 're in a small way of business, it ruins them," said Scruby. "Now that poor devil,—he has n't had a shilling of his money yet, and the greater part has been paid out of his pocket to the posters. It is hard."

It comforted Vavasor when he thus heard that there were others who were more backward in their payments even than himself, and made him reflect that a longer credit than had yet been achieved by him might perhaps be within his reach. "It is astonishing how much a man may get done for him," said he, "without paying anything for years."

"Yes; that 's true. So he may, if he knows how to go about it. But when he does pay, Mr. Vavasor, he does it through the nose;—cent. per cent., and worse, for all his former shortcomings."

"How many there are who never pay at all," said George.

"Yes, Mr. Vavasor;—that 's true, too. But see what a life they lead. It is n't a pleasant thing to be afraid of coming into your agent's office; not what you would like, Mr. Vavasor;—not if I know you."

"I never was afraid of meeting any one yet," said Vavasor; "but I don't know what I may come to."

"Nor never will, I 'll go bail. But, Lord love you, I could tell you such tales! I 've had Members of Parliament, past, present, and future, almost down on their knees to me in this little room. It 's about a month or six weeks before the elections come on when

they 're at their worst. There is so much, you see, Mr. Vavasor, for which a gentleman must pay ready money. It is n't like a business in which a lawyer is supposed to find the capital. If I had money enough to pay out of my own pocket all the cost of all the metropolitan gentlemen for whom I act, why, I could live on the interest without any trouble, and go into Parliament myself like a man."

George Vavasor perfectly understood that Mr. Scruby was explaining to him, with what best attempt at delicacy he could make, that funds for the expense of the Chelsea election were not to be forthcoming from the great Marlborough Street establishment.

"I suppose so," said he. "But you do do it sometimes."

"Never, Mr. Vavasor," said Mr. Scruby, very solemnly. "As a rule, never. I may advance the money on interest, of course, when I receive a guarantee from the candidate's father, or from six or seven among the committee, who must all be very substantial,—very substantial indeed. But in a general way I don't do it. It is n't my place."

"I thought you did;—but at any rate I don't want you to do it for me."

"I 'm quite sure you don't," said Mr. Scruby, with a brighter tone of voice than that he had just been using. "I never thought you did, Mr. Vavasor. Lord bless you, Mr. Vavasor, I know the difference between gentlemen as soon as I see them."

Then they went to business, and Vavasor became aware that it would be thought convenient that he should lodge with Mr. Scruby, to his own account, a sum not less than six hundred pounds within the next

week, and it would be also necessary that he should provide for taking up that bill, amounting to ninety-two pounds, which he had given to the landlord of the Handsome Man. In short, it would be well that he should borrow a thousand pounds from Alice, and as he did not wish that the family attorney of the Vavasors should be employed to raise it, he communicated to Mr. Scruby as much of his plans as was necessary, —feeling more hesitation in doing it than might have been expected from him. When he had done so, he was very intent on explaining also that the money taken from his cousin, and future bride, would be repaid to her out of the property in Westmoreland, which was,—did he say settled on himself? I am afraid he did.

"Yes, yes;—a family arrangement," said Mr. Scruby, as he congratulated him on his proposed marriage. Mr. Scruby did not care a straw from what source the necessary funds might be drawn.

CHAPTER X.

JOHN GREY GOES A SECOND TIME TO LONDON.

Early in that conversation which Mr. Vavasor had with his daughter, and which was recorded a few pages back, he implored her to pause awhile before she informed Mr. Grey of her engagement with her cousin. Nothing, however, on that point had been settled between them. Mr. Vavasor had wished her to say that she would not write till he should have assented to her doing so. She had declined to bind herself in this way, and then they had gone off to other things;—to George Vavasor's character and the disposition of her money. Alice, however, had felt herself bound not to write to Mr. Grey quite at once. Indeed, when her cousin left her she had no appetite for writing such a letter as hers was to be. A day or two passed by her in this way, and nothing more was said by her or her father. It was now the middle of January, and the reader may remember that Mr. Grey had promised that he would come to her in London in that month, as soon as he should know that she had returned from Westmoreland. She must at any rate do something to prevent that visit. Mr. Grey would not come without giving her notice. She knew enough of the habits of the man to be sure of that. But she desired that her letter to him should be in time to prevent his to her; so when those few days were gone, she sat down to

write without speaking to her father again upon the subject.

It was a terrible job;—perhaps the most difficult of all the difficult tasks which her adverse fate had imposed upon her. She found when she did attempt it, that she could have done it better if she had done it at the moment when she was writing the other letter to her cousin George. Then Kate had been near her, and she had been comforted by Kate's affectionate happiness. She had been strengthened at that moment by a feeling that she was doing the best in her power, if not for herself, at any rate for others. All that comfort and all that strength had left her now. The atmosphere of the fells had buoyed her up, and now the thick air of London depressed her. She sat for hours with the pen in her hand, and could not write the letter. She let a day go by and a night, and still it was not written. She hardly knew herself in her unnatural weakness. As the mental photographs of the two men forced themselves upon her, she could not force herself to forget those words—"Look here, upon this picture —and on this." How was it that she now knew how great was the difference between the two men, how immense the pre-eminence of him whom she had rejected;—and that she had not before been able to see this on any of those many previous occasions on which she had compared the two together? As she thought of her cousin George's face when he left her room a few days since, and remembered Mr. Grey's countenance when last he held her hand at Cheltenham, the quiet dignity of his beauty which would submit to show no consciousness of injury, she could not but tell herself that when Paradise had been opened to her, she had

declared herself to be fit only for Pandemonium. In that was her chief misery; that now,—now when it was too late,—she could look at it aright.

But the letter must be written, and on the second day she declared to herself that she would not rise from her chair till it was done. The letter was written on that day and was posted. I will now ask the reader to go down with me to Nethercoats that we may be present with John Grey when he received it. He was sitting at breakfast in his study there, and opposite to him, lounging in an arm-chair, with a Quarterly in his hand, was the most intimate of his friends, Frank Seward, a fellow of the college to which they had both belonged. Mr. Seward was a clergyman, and the tutor of his college, and a man who worked very hard at Cambridge. In the days of his leisure he spent much of his time at Nethercoats, and he was the only man to whom Grey had told anything of his love for Alice and of his disappointment. Even to Seward he had not told the whole story. He had at first informed his friend that he was engaged to be married, and as he had told this as no secret,—having even said that he hated secrets on such matters,—the engagement had been mentioned in the common room of their college, and men at Cambridge knew that Mr. Grey was going to take to himself a wife. Then Mr. Seward had been told that trouble had come, and that it was not improbable that there would be no such marriage. Even when saying this Mr. Grey told none of the particulars, though he owned to his friend that a heavy blow had struck him. His intimacy with Seward was of that thorough kind which is engendered only out of such young and lasting friendship as had existed between

them; but even to such a friend as this Mr. Grey could not open his whole heart. It was only to a friend who should also be his wife that he could do that,—as he himself thoroughly understood. He had felt that such a friend was wanting to him, and he had made the attempt.

"Don't speak of this as yet," he had said to Mr. Seward. "Of course when the matter is settled, those few people who know me must know it. But perhaps there may be a doubt as yet, and as long as there is a doubt, it is better that it should not be discussed."

He had said no more than this,—had imputed no blame to Alice,—had told none of the circumstances; but Seward had known that the girl had jilted his friend, and had made up his mind that she must be heartless and false. He had known also that his friend would never look for any other such companion for his home.

Letters were brought to each of them on this morning, and Seward's attention was of course occupied by those which he received. Grey, as soon as the envelopes had touched his hand, became aware that one of them was from Alice, and this he at once opened. He did it very calmly, but without any of that bravado of indifference with which George Vavasor had received Alice's letter from Westmoreland.

"It is right that I should tell you at once," said Alice, rushing into the middle of her subject without even the formality of the customary address—"It is right that I should tell you at once that——" Oh, the difficulty which she had encountered when her words had carried her as far as this!—"that my

cousin, George Vavasor, has repeated to me his offer of marriage, and that I have accepted it. I tell you, chiefly in order that I may save you from the trouble which you purposed to take when I last saw you at Cheltenham. I will not tell you any of the circumstances of this engagement, because I have no right to presume that you will care to hear them. I hardly dare to ask you to believe of me that in all that I have done, I have endeavoured to act with truth and honesty. That I have been very ignorant, foolish,—what you will that is bad, I know well; otherwise there could not have been so much in the last few years of my life on which I am utterly ashamed to look back. For the injury that I have done you, I can only express deep contrition. I do not dare to ask you to forgive me.

"ALICE VAVASOR."

She had tormented herself in writing this,—had so nearly driven herself distracted with attempts which she had destroyed, that she would not even read once to herself these last words. "He 'll know it, and that is all that is necessary," she said to herself as she sent the letter away from her.

Mr. Grey read it twice over, leaving the other letters unnoticed on the table by his tea-cup. He read it twice over, and the work of reading it was one to him of intense agony. Hitherto he had fed himself with hope. That Alice should have been brought to think of her engagement with him in a spirit of doubt and with a mind so troubled, that she had been inclined to attempt an escape from it, had been very grievous to him; but it had been in his mind a fantasy, a morbid

fear of himself, which might be cured by time. He, at any rate, would give all his energies towards achieving such a cure. There had been one thing, however, which he most feared;—which he had chiefly feared, though he had forbidden himself to think that it could be probable, and this thing had now happened.

He had ever disliked and feared George Vavasor;—not from any effect which the man had upon himself, for, as we know, his acquaintance with Vavasor was of the slightest;—but he had feared and disliked his influence upon Alice. He had also feared the influence of her cousin Kate. To have cautioned Alice against her cousins would have been to him impossible. It was not his nature to express suspicion to one he loved. Is the tone of that letter remembered in which he had answered Alice when she informed him that her cousin George was to go with Kate and her to Switzerland? He had written, with a pleasant joke, words which Alice had been able to read with some little feeling of triumph to her two friends. He had not so written because he liked what he knew of the man. He disliked all that he knew of him. But it had not been possible for him to show that he distrusted the prudence of her, whom, as his future wife, he was prepared to trust in all things.

I have said that he read Alice's letter with an agony of sorrow; as he sat with it in his hand he suffered as, probably, he had never suffered before. But there was nothing in his countenance to show that he was in pain. Seward had received some long epistle, crossed from end to end,—indicative, I should say, of a not far distant termination to that college tutorship,—and was reading it with placid contentment. It did not

occur to him to look across at Grey, but had he done so, I doubt whether he would have seen anything to attract his attention. But Grey, though he was wounded, would not allow himself to be dismayed. There was less hope now than before, but there might still be hope;—hope for her, even though there might be none for him. Tidings had reached his ears also as to George Vavasor, which had taught him to believe that the man was needy, reckless, and on the brink of ruin. Such a marriage to Alice Vavasor would be altogether ruinous. Whatever might be his own ultimate fate he would still seek to save her from that. Her cousin, doubtless, wanted her money. Might it not be possible that he would be satisfied with her money, and that thus the woman might be saved?

"Seward," he said at last, addressing his friend, who had not yet come to the end of the last crossed page.

"Is there anything wrong?" said Seward.

"Well;—yes; there is something a little wrong. I fear I must leave you, and go up to town to-day."

"Nobody ill, I hope?"

"No;—nobody is ill. But I must go up to London. Mrs. Bole will take care of you, and you must not be angry with me for leaving you?"

Seward assured him that he would not be in the least angry, and that he was thoroughly conversant with the capabilities and good intentions of Mrs. Bole the housekeeper; but added, that as he was so near his own college, he would of course go back to Cambridge. He longed to say some word as to the purpose of Grey's threatened journey; to make some inquiry as to this new trouble; but he knew that Grey

was a man who did not well bear close inquiries, and he was silent.

"Why not stay here?" said Grey, after a minute's pause. "I wish you would, old fellow; I do, indeed." There was a tone of special affection in his voice which struck Seward at once.

"If I can be of the slightest service or comfort to you, I will of course."

Grey again sat silent for a little while. "I wish you would; I do, indeed."

"Then I will." And again there was a pause.

"I have got a letter here from—Miss Vavasor," said Grey.

"May I hope that——"

"No;—it does not bring good news to me. I do not know that I can tell it you all. I would if I could, but the whole story is one not to be told in a hurry. I should leave false impressions. There are things which a man cannot tell."

"Indeed there are," said Seward.

"I wish with all my heart that you knew it all as I know it; but that is impossible. There are things which happen in a day which it would take a lifetime to explain." Then there was another pause. "I have heard bad news this morning, and I must go up to London at once. I shall go into Ely so as to be there by twelve; and if you will, you shall drive me over. I may be back in a day; certainly in less than a week; but it will be a comfort to me to know that I shall find you here."

The matter was so arranged, and at eleven they started. During the first two miles not a word was spoken between them. "Seward," Grey said at last,

"if I fail in what I am going to attempt, it is probable that you will never hear Alice Vavasor's name mentioned by me again; but I want you always to bear this in mind;—that at no moment has my opinion of her ever been changed, nor must you in such case imagine from my silence that it has changed. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do."

"To my thinking she is the finest of God's creatures that I have known. It may be that in her future life she will be severed from me altogether; but I shall not, therefore, think the less well of her; and I wish that you, as my friend, should know that I so esteem her, even though her name should never be mentioned between us." Seward, in some few words, assured him that it should be so, and then they finished their journey in silence.

From the station at Ely, Grey sent a message by the wires up to John Vavasor, saying that he would call on him that afternoon at his office in Chancery Lane. The chances were always much against finding Mr. Vavasor at his office; but on this occasion the telegram did reach him there, and he remained till the unaccustomed hour of half-past four to meet the man who was to have been his son-in-law.

"Have you heard from her?" he asked as soon as Grey entered the dingy little room, not in Chancery Lane, but in its neighbourhood, which was allocated to him for his signing purposes.

"Yes," said Grey; "she has written to me."

"And told you about her cousin George. I tried to hinder her from writing, but she is very wilful."

"Why should you have hindered her? If the thing

was to be told, it is better that it should be done at once."

"But I hoped that there might be an escape. I don't know what you think of all this, Grey, but to me it is the bitterest misfortune that I have known. And I 've had some bitter things, too," he added,—thinking of that period of his life, when the work of which he was ashamed was first ordained as his future task.

"What is the escape that you hoped?" asked Grey.

"I hardly know. The whole thing seems to me to be so mad, that I partly trusted that she would see the madness of it. I am not sure whether you know anything of my nephew George?" asked Mr. Vavasor.

"Very little," said Grey.

"I believe him to be utterly an adventurer,—a man without means and without principle,—upon the whole about as bad a man as you may meet. I give you my word, Grey, that I don't think I know a worse man. He 's going to marry her for her money; then he will beggar her, after that he 'll ill-treat her, and yet what can I do?"

"Prevent the marriage."

"But how, my dear fellow? Prevent it! It 's all very well to say that, and it 's the very thing I want to do. But how am I to prevent it? She 's as much her own master as you are yours. She can give him every shilling of her fortune to-morrow. How am I to prevent her from marrying him?"

"Let her give him every shilling of her fortune to-morrow," said Grey.

"And what is she to do then?" asked Mr. Vavasor.

"Then—then,—then,—then let her come to me," said John Grey; and as he spoke there was the frag-

ment of a tear in his eye, and the hint of a quiver in his voice.

Even the worldly, worn-out, unsympathetic nature of John Vavasor was struck, and, as it were, warmed by this.

"God bless you; God bless you, my dear fellow. I heartily wish for her sake that I could look forward to any such an end to this affair."

"And why not look forward to it? You say that he merely wants her money. As he wants it, let him have it."

"But, Grey, you do not know Alice; you do not understand my girl. When she had lost her fortune nothing would induce her to become your wife."

"Leave that to follow as it may," said John Grey. "Our first object must be to sever her from a man, who is, as you say, himself on the verge of ruin; and who would certainly make her wretched. I am here now, not because I wish her to be my own wife, but because I wish that she should not become the wife of such a one as your nephew. If I were you I would let him have her money."

"If you were I, you would have nothing more to do with it than the man that is as yet unborn. I know that she will give him her money because she has said so; but I have no power as to her giving it or as to her withholding it. That 's the hardship of my position;—but it is of no use to think of that now."

John Grey certainly did not think about it. He knew well that Alice was independent, and that she was not inclined to give up that independence to any one. He had not expected that her father would be able to do much towards hindering his daughter from

becoming the wife of George Vavasor, but he had wished that he himself and her father should be in accord in their views, and he found that this was so. When he left Mr. Vavasor's room nothing had been said about the period of the marriage. Grey thought it improbable that Alice would find herself able to give herself in marriage to her cousin immediately,—so soon after her breach with him; but as to this he had no assurance, and he determined to have the facts from her own lips, if she would see him. So he wrote to her, naming a day on which he would call upon her early in the morning; and having received from her no prohibition, he was in Queen Anne Street at the hour appointed.

He had conceived a scheme which he had not made known to Mr. Vavasor, and as to the practicability of which he had much doubt; but which, nevertheless, he was resolved to try if he should find the attempt possible. He himself would buy off George Vavasor. He had ever been a prudent man, and he had money at command. If Vavasor was such a man as they, who knew him best, represented him, such a purchase might be possible. But then, before this was attempted, he must be quite sure that he knew his man, and he must satisfy himself also that in doing so he would not, in truth, add to Alice's misery. He could hardly bring himself to think it possible that she did, in truth, love her cousin with passionate love. It seemed to him, as he remembered what Alice had been to himself, that this must be impossible. But if it were so, that of course must put an end to his interference. He thought that if he saw her he might learn all this, and therefore he went to Queen Anne Street.

"Of course he must come if he will," she said to herself when she received his note. "It can make no matter. He will say nothing half so hard to me as what I say to myself all day long." But when the morning came, and the hour came, and the knock at the door for which her ears were on the alert, her heart misgave her, and she felt that the present moment of her punishment, though not the heaviest, would still be hard to bear.

He came slowly upstairs,—his step was ever slow, —and gently opened the door for himself. Then, before he even looked at her, he closed it again. I do not know how to explain that it was so; but it was this perfect command of himself at all seasons which had in part made Alice afraid of him, and drove her to believe that they were not fitted for each other. She, when he thus turned for a moment from her, and then walked slowly towards her, stood with both her hands leaning on the centre table of the room, and with her eyes fixed upon its surface.

"Alice," he said, walking up to her very slowly.

Her whole frame shuddered as she heard the sweetness of his voice. Had I not better tell the truth of her at once? Oh, if she could only have been his again! What madness during these last six months had driven her to such a plight as this! The old love came back upon her. Nay; it had never gone. But that trust in his love returned to her,—that trust which told her that such love and such worth would have sufficed to make her happy. But this confidence in him was worthless now! Even though he should desire it, she could not change again.

"Alice," he said again. And then, as slowly she

looked up at him, he asked her for her hand. "You may give it to me," he said, "as to an old friend." She put her hand in his hand, and then, withdrawing it, felt that she must never trust herself to do so again.

"Alice," he continued, "I do not expect you to say much to me; but there is a question or two which I think you will answer. Has a day been fixed for this marriage?"

"No," she said.

"Will it be in a month?"

"Oh no;—not for a year," she replied hurriedly;—and he knew at once by her voice that she already dreaded this new wedlock. Whatever of anger he might before have felt for her was banished. She had brought herself by her ill-judgment,—by her ignorance, as she had confessed,—to a sad pass; but he believed that she was still worthy of his love.

"And now one other question, Alice;—but if you are silent, I will not ask it again. Can you tell me why you have again accepted your cousin's offer?"

"Because—" she said very quickly, looking up as though she were about to speak with all her old courage. "But you would never understand me," she said, —"and there can be no reason why I should dare to hope that you should ever think well of me again."

He knew that there was no love,—no love for that man to whom she had pledged her hand. He did not know, on the other, how strong, how unchanged, how true was her love for himself. Indeed, of himself he was thinking not at all. He desired to learn whether she would suffer, if by any scheme he might succeed in breaking off this marriage. When he had asked her whether she were to be married at once, she had

shuddered at the thought. When he asked her why she had accepted her cousin, she had faltered, and hinted at some excuse which he might fail to understand. Had she loved George Vavasor, he could have understood that well enough.

"Alice," he said, speaking still very slowly, "nothing has ever yet been done which need to a certainty separate you and me. I am a persistent man, and I do not even yet give up all hope. A year is a long time. As you say yourself, I do not as yet quite understand you. But, Alice,—and I think that the position in which we stood a few months since justifies me in saying so without offence,—I love you now as well as ever, and should things change with you, I cannot tell you with how much joy and eagerness I should take you back to my bosom. My heart is yours now as it has been since I knew you."

Then he again just touched her hand, and left her before she had been able to answer a word.

"My he[illegible] yours m[illegible]"

LESLIE W LEE

CHAPTER XI.

MR. TOMBE'S ADVICE.

ALICE sat alone for an hour without moving when John Grey had left her, and the last words which he had uttered were sounding in her ears all the time, "My heart is still yours, as it has been since I knew you." There had been something in his words which had soothed her spirits, and had, for the moment, almost comforted her. At any rate, he did not despise her. He could not have spoken such words as these to her had he not still held her high in his esteem. Nay;—had he not even declared that he would yet take her as his own if she would come to him? "I cannot tell you with how much joy I would take you back to my bosom!" Ah! that might never be. But yet the assurance had been sweet to her;—dangerously sweet, as she soon told herself. She knew that she had lost her Eden, but it was something to her that the master of the garden had not himself driven her forth. She sat there, thinking of her fate, as though it belonged to some other one,—not to herself; as though it were a tale that she had read. Herself she had shipwrecked altogether; but though she might sink, she had not been thrust from the ship by hands which she loved.

But would it not have been better that he should have scorned her and reviled her? Had he been able

to do so, he at least would have escaped the grief of disappointed love. Had he learned to despise her he would have ceased to regret her. She had no right to feel consolation in the fact that his sufferings were equal to her own. But when she thought of this, she told herself that it could not be that it was so. He was a man, she said, not passionate by nature. Alas! it was the mistake she had ever made when summing up the items of his character! He might be persistent, she thought, in still striving to do that upon which he had once resolved. He had said so, and that which he said was always true to the letter. But, nevertheless, when this thing which he still chose to pursue should have been put absolutely beyond his reach, he would not allow his calm bosom to be harassed by a vain regret. He was a man too whole at every point,—so Alice told herself,—to allow his happiness to be marred by such an accident.

But must the accident occur? Was there no chance that he might be saved, even from such trouble as might follow upon such a loss? Could it not be possible that he might be gratified,—since it would gratify him,—and that she might be saved? Over and over again she considered this,—but always as though it were another woman whom she would fain save, and not herself.

But she knew that her own fate was fixed. She had been mad when she had done the thing, but the thing was not on that account the less done. She had been mad when she had trusted herself abroad with two persons, both of whom, as she had well known, were intent on wrenching her happiness from out of her grasp. She had been mad when she had told herself,

whilst walking over the Westmoreland fells, that after all she might as well marry her cousin, since that other marriage was then beyond her reach! Her two cousins had succeeded in blighting all the hopes of her life;—but what could she now think of herself in that she had been so weak as to submit to such usage from their hands? Alas!—she told herself, admitting in her misery all her weakness,—alas, she had had no mother. She had gloried in her independence, and this had come of it! She had scorned the prudence of Lady Macleod, and her scorn had brought her to this pass!

Was she to give herself bodily,—body and soul, as she said aloud in her solitary agony,—to a man whom she did not love? Must she submit to his caresses,—lie on his bosom,—turn herself warmly to his kisses? "No," she said, "no,"—speaking audibly, as she walked about the room; "no;—it was not in my bargain; I never meant it." But if so, what had she meant;—what had been her dream? Of what marriage had she thought, when she was writing that letter back to George Vavasor? How am I to analyse her mind, and make her thoughts and feelings intelligible to those who may care to trouble themselves with the study? Any sacrifice she would make for her cousin which one friend could make for another. She would fight his battles with her money, with her words, with her sympathy. She would sit with him if he needed it, and speak comfort to him by the hour. His disgrace should be her disgrace;—his glory her glory;—his pursuits her pursuits. Was not that the marriage to which she had consented? But he had come to her and asked her for a kiss, and she had shuddered before

him, when he made the demand. Then that other one had come and had touched her hand, and the fibres of her body had seemed to melt within her at the touch, so that she could have fallen at his feet.

She had done very wrong. She knew that she had done wrong. She knew that she had sinned with that sin which specially disgraces a woman. She had said that she would become the wife of a man to whom she could not cleave with a wife's love; and, mad with a vile ambition, she had given up the man for whose modest love her heart was longing. She had thrown off from her that wondrous aroma of precious delicacy, which is the greatest treasure of womanhood. She had sinned against her sex; and, in an agony of despair, as she crouched down upon the floor with her head against her chair, she told herself that there was no pardon for her. She understood it now, and knew that she could not forgive herself.

But can you forgive her, delicate reader? Or am I asking the question too early in my story? For myself, I have forgiven her. The story of the struggle has been present to my mind for many years,—and I have learned to think that even this offence against womanhood may, with deep repentance, be forgiven. And you also must forgive her before we close the book, or else my story will have been told amiss.

But let us own that she had sinned,—almost damnably, almost past forgiveness. What!—think that she knew what love meant, and not know which of two she loved! What!—doubt of two men for whose arms she longed, of which the kisses would be sweet to bear! on which side lay the modesty of her maiden love! Faugh! She had submitted to pollution of

heart and feeling before she had brought herself to such a pass as this. Come;—let us see if it be possible that she may be cleansed by the fire of her sorrow.

"What am I to do?" She passed that whole day in asking herself that question. She was herself astounded at the rapidity with which the conviction had forced itself upon her that a marriage with her cousin would be to her almost impossible; and could she permit it to be said of her that she had thrice in her career jilted a promised suitor,—that three times she would go back from her word because her fancy had changed? Where could she find the courage to tell her father, to tell Kate, to tell even George himself, that her purpose was again altered? But she had a year at her disposal. If only during that year he would take her money and squander it, and then require nothing further of her hands, might she not thus escape the doom before her? Might it not be possible that the refusal should this time come from him? But she succeeded in making one resolve. She thought at least that she succeeded. Come what come might, she would never stand with him at the altar. While there was a cliff from which she might fall, water that would cover her, a death-dealing grain that might be mixed in her cup, she could not submit herself to be George Vavasor's wife. To no ear could she tell of this resolve. To no friend could she hint her purpose. She owed her money to the man after what had passed between them. It was his right to count upon such assistance as that would give him, and he should have it. Only as his betrothed she could give it him, for she understood well that if there were any breach between them, his accepting of such aid would be impossible. He

should have her money, and then, when the day came, some escape should be found.

In the afternoon her father came to her, and it may be as well to explain that Mr. Grey had seen him again that day. Mr. Grey, when he left Queen Anne Street, had gone to his lawyer, and from thence had made his way to Mr. Vavasor. It was between five and six when Mr. Vavasor came back to his house, and he then found his daughter sitting over the drawing-room fire, without lights, in the gloom of the evening. Mr. Vavasor had returned with Grey to the lawyer's chambers, and had from thence come direct to his own house. He had been startled at the precision with which all the circumstances of his daughter's position had been explained to a mild-eyed old gentleman, with a bald head, who carried on his business in a narrow, dark, clean street, behind Doctors' Commons. Mr. Tombe was his name. "No," Mr. Grey had said, when Mr. Vavasor had asked as to the peculiar nature of Mr. Tombe's business; "he is not specially an ecclesiastical lawyer. He had a partner at Ely, and was always employed by my father, and by most of the clergy there." Mr. Tombe had evinced no surprise, no dismay, and certainly no mock delicacy, when the whole affair was under discussion. George Vavasor was to get present moneys, but—if it could be so arranged—from John Grey's stores rather than from those belonging to Alice. Mr. Tombe could probably arrange that with Mr. Vavasor's lawyer, who would no doubt be able to make difficulty as to raising ready money. Mr. Tombe would be able to raise ready money without difficulty. And then, at last, George Vavasor was to be made to surrender his bride, taking or having taken the price of

his bargain. John Vavasor sat by in silence as the arrangement was being made, not knowing how to speak. He had no money with which to give assistance. "I wish you to understand from the lady's father," Grey said to the lawyer, "that the marriage would be regarded by him with as much dismay as by myself."

"Certainly;—it would be ruinous," Mr. Vavasor had answered.

"And you see, Mr. Tombe," Mr. Grey went on, "we only wish to try the man. If he be not such as we believe him to be, he can prove it by his conduct. If he is worthy of her, he can then take her."

"You merely wish to open her eyes, Mr. Grey," said the mild-eyed lawyer.

"I wish that he should have what money he wants, and then we shall find what it is he really wishes."

"Yes; we shall know our man," said the lawyer. "He shall have the money, Mr. Grey," and so the interview had been ended.

Mr. Vavasor, when he entered the drawing-room, addressed his daughter in a cheery voice. "What! all in the dark?"

"Yes, papa. Why should I have candles when I am doing nothing? I did not expect you."

"No; I suppose not. I came here because I want to say a few words to you about business."

"What business, papa?" Alice well understood the tone of her father's voice. He was desirous of propitiating her; but was at the same time desirous of carrying some point in which he thought it probable that she would oppose him.

"Well, my love, if I understood you rightly, your cousin George wants some money."

"I did not say that he wants it now; but I think he will want it before the time for the election comes."

"If so, he will want it at once. He has not asked you for it yet?"

"No; he has merely said that should he be in need he would take me at my word."

"I think there is no doubt that he wants it. Indeed, I believe that he is almost entirely without present means of his own."

"I can hardly think so; but I have no knowledge about it. I can only say that he has not asked me yet, and that I should wish to oblige him whenever he may do so."

"To what extent, Alice?"

"I don't know what I have. I get about four hundred a year, but I do not know what it is worth, or how far it can all be turned into money. I should wish to keep a hundred a year, and let him have the rest."

"What! eight thousand pounds?" said the father, who, in spite of his wish not to oppose her, could not but express his dismay.

"I do not imagine that he will want so much; but if he should, I wish that he should have it."

"Heaven and earth!" said John Vavasor. "Of course we should have to give up the house." He could not suppress his trouble, or refrain from bursting out in agony at the prospect of such a loss.

"But he has asked me for nothing yet, papa."

"No, exactly; and perhaps he may not; but I wish to know what to do when the demand is made. I am not going to oppose you now; your money is your own, and you have a right to do with it as you please; —but would you gratify me in one thing?"

"What is it, papa?"

"When he does apply, let the amount be raised through me?"

"How through you?"

"Come to me; I mean, so that I may see the lawyer, and have the arrangements made." Then he explained to her that in dealing with large sums of money, it could not be right that she should do so without his knowledge, even though the property was her own. "I will promise you that I will not oppose your wishes," he said. Then Alice undertook that when such case should arise the money should be raised through his means.

The day but one following this she received a letter from Lady Glencora, who was still at Matching Priory. It was a light-spirited, chatty, amusing letter, intended to be happy in its tone,—intended to have a flavour of happiness, but just failing through the too apparent meaning of a word here and there. "You will see that I am at Matching," the latter said, "whereas you will remember that I was to have been at Monkshade. I escaped at last by a violent effort, and am now passing my time innocently,—I fear not so profitably as she would induce me to do,—with Iphy Palliser. You remember Iphy. She is a good creature, and would fain turn even me to profit, if it were possible. I own that I am thinking of them all at Monkshade, and am in truth delighted that I am not there. My absence is entirely laid upon your shoulders. That wicked evening amidst the ruins! Poor ruins! I go there alone sometimes and fancy that I hear such voices from the walls, and see such faces through the broken windows! All the old Pallisers come and frown at me, and tell

me that I am not good enough to belong to them. There is a particular window to which Sir Guy comes and makes faces at me. I told Iphy the other day, and she answered me very gravely, that I might, if I chose, make myself good enough for the Pallisers. Even for the Pallisers! Is n't that beautiful?"

Then Lady Glencora went on to say, that her husband intended to come up to London early in the session, and that she would accompany him. "That is," added Lady Glencora, "if I am still good enough for the Pallisers at that time."

CHAPTER XII.

THE INN AT SHAP.

When George Vavasor left Mr. Scruby's office—the attentive reader will remember that he did call upon Mr. Scruby, the parliamentary lawyer, and there recognised the necessity of putting himself in possession of a small sum of money with as little delay as possible;—when he left the attorney's office, he was well aware that the work to be done was still before him. And he knew also that the job to be undertaken was a very disagreeable job. He did not like the task of borrowing his cousin Alice's money.

We all of us know that swindlers and rogues do very dirty tricks, and we are apt to picture to ourselves a certain amount of gusto and delight on the part of the swindlers in the doing of them. In this, I think we are wrong. The poor, broken, semi-genteel beggar, who borrows half-sovereigns apiece from all his old acquaintances, knowing that they know that he will never repay them, suffers a separate little agony with each petition that he makes. He does not enjoy pleasant sailing in this journey which he is making. To be refused is painful to him. To get his half-sovereign with scorn is painful. To get it with apparent confidence in his honour is almost more painful. "D—— it," he says to himself on such rare occasions, "I will pay that fellow;" and yet, as he says it, he

knows that he never will pay even that fellow. It is a comfortless, unsatisfying trade, that of living upon other people's money.

How was George Vavasor to make his first step towards getting his hand into his cousin's purse? He had gone to her asking for her love, and she had shuddered when he asked her. That had been the commencement of their life under their new engagement. He knew very well that the money would be forthcoming when he demanded it,—but under their present joint circumstances, how was he to make the demand? If he wrote to her, should he simply ask for money, and make no allusion to his love? If he went to her in person, should he make his visit a mere visit of business,—as he might call on his banker?

He resolved at last that Kate should do the work for him. Indeed, he had felt all along that it would be well that Kate should act as ambassador between him and Alice in money matters, as she had long done in other things. He could talk to Kate as he could not talk to Alice;—and then, between the women, those hard money necessities would be softened down by a romantic phraseology which he would not himself know how to use with any effect. He made up his mind to see Kate, and with this view he went down to Westmoreland; and took himself to a small wayside inn at Shap among the fells, which had been known to him of old. He gave his sister notice that he would be there, and begged her to come over to him as early as she might find it possible on the morning after his arrival. He himself reached the place late in the evening by train from London. There is a station at Shap, by which the railway company no doubt conceives

that it has conferred on that somewhat rough and remote locality all the advantages of a refined civilisation; but I doubt whether the Shappites have been thankful for the favour. The landlord at the inn, for one, is not thankful. Shap had been a place owing all such life as it had possessed to coaching and posting. It had been a stage on the high road from Lancaster to Carlisle, and though it lay high and bleak among the fells, and was a cold, windy, thinly populated place,—filling all travellers with thankfulness that they had not been made Shappites,—nevertheless, it had had its glory in its coaching and posting. I have no doubt that there are men and women who look back with a fond regret to the palmy days of Shap.

Vavasor reached the little inn about nine in the evening on a night that was pitchy dark, and in a wind which made it necessary for him to hold his hat on to his head. "What a beastly country to live in," he said to himself, resolving that he would certainly sell Vavasor Hall in spite of all family associations, if ever the power to do so should be his. "What trash it is," he said, "hanging on to such a place as that without the means of living like a gentleman, simply because one's ancestors have done so." And then he expressed a doubt to himself whether all the world contained a more ignorant, opinionated, useless old man than his grandfather,—or, in short, a greater fool.

"Well, Mr. George," said the landlord as soon as he saw him, "a sight of you 's guid for sair een. It 's o'er lang since you 've been doon amang the fells." But George did not want to converse with the innkeeper, or to explain how it was that he did not visit Vavasor Hall. The innkeeper, no doubt, knew all

about it,—knew that the grandfather had quarrelled with his grandson, and knew the reason why; but George, if he suspected such knowledge, did not choose to refer to it. So he simply grunted something in reply, and getting himself in before a spark of fire which hardly was burning in a public room with a sandy floor, begged that the little sitting-room upstairs might be got ready for him. There he passed the evening in solitude, giving no encouragement to the landlord, who, nevertheless, looked him up three or four times,—till at last George said that his head ached, and that he would wish to be alone. "He was always one of them cankery chiels as never have a kindly word for man nor beast," said the landlord. "Seems as though that raw slash in his face had gone right through into his heart." After that George was left alone, and sat thinking whether it would not be better to ask Alice for two thousand pounds at once,—so as to save him from the disagreeable necessity of a second borrowing before their marriage. He was very uneasy in his mind. He had flattered himself through it all that his cousin had loved him. He had felt sure that such was the case while they were together in Switzerland. When she had determined to give up John Grey, of course he had told himself the same thing. When she had at once answered his first subsequent overture with an assent, he had of course been certain that it was so. Dark, selfish, and even dishonest as he was, he had, nevertheless, enjoyed something of a lover's true pleasure in believing that Alice had still loved him through all their mischances. But his joy had in a moment been turned into gall during that interview in Queen Anne Street. He had

read the truth at a glance. A man must be very vain, or else very little used to such matters, who at George Vavasor's age cannot understand the feelings with which a woman receives him. When Alice contrived as she had done to escape the embrace he was so well justified in asking, he knew the whole truth. He was sore at heart, and very angry withal. He could have readily spurned her from him, and rejected her who had once rejected him. He would have done so had not his need for her money restrained him. He was not a man who could deceive himself in such matters. He knew that this was so, and he told himself that he was a rascal.

Vavasor Hall was, by the road, about five miles from Shap, and it was not altogether an easy task for Kate to get over to the village without informing her grandfather that the visit was to be made, and what was its purport. She could, indeed, walk, and the walk would not be so long as that she had taken with Alice to Swindale Fell;—but walking to an inn on a high road, is not the same thing as walking to a point on a hillside over a lake. Had she been dirty, draggled, and wet through on Swindale Fell, it would have simply been matter for mirth; but her brother she knew would not have liked to see her enter the Lowther Arms at Shap in such a condition. It therefore became necessary that she should ask her grandfather to lend her the jaunting-car.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked sharply. In such establishments as that at Vavasor Hall the family horse is generally used for double duties. Though he draws the lady of the house one day, he is not too proud to draw manure on the next. And it will always

be found that the master of the house gives a great preference to the manure over the lady. The squire at Vavasor had come to do so to such an extent that he regarded any application for the animal's services as an encroachment.

"Only to Shap, grandpapa."

"To Shap! what on earth can take you to Shap? There are no shops at Shap."

"I am not going to do shopping; I want to see some one there."

"Whom can you want to see at Shap?"

Then it occurred to Kate on the spur of the moment that she might as well tell her grandfather the fact. "My brother has come down," she said, "and is at the inn there. I had not intended to tell you, as I did not wish to mention his name till you had consented to receive him here."

"And he expects to come here now;—does he?" said the squire.

"Oh no, sir. I think he has no expectation of the kind. He has come down simply to see me;—about business, I believe."

"Business! what business? I suppose he wants to get your money from you?"

"I think it is with reference to his marriage. I think he wants me to use my influence with Alice that it may not be delayed."

"Look here, Kate; if ever you lend him your money, or any of it,—that is, of the principal, I mean, —I will never speak to him again under any circumstance. And more than that! Look here, Kate. In spite of all that is past and gone, the property will become his for his life when I die,—unless I change my

will. If he gets your money from you, I will change it, and he shall not be a shilling richer at my death than he is now. You can have the horse to go to Shap."

What unlucky chance had it been which had put this idea into the old squire's head on this especial morning? Kate had resolved that she would entreat her brother to make use of her little fortune. She feared that he was now coming with some reference to his cousin's money,—that something was to be done to enable him to avail himself of his cousin's offer; and Kate, almost blushing in the solitude of her chamber at the thought, was determined that her brother must be saved from such temptation. She knew that money was necessary to him. She knew that he could not stand a second contest without assistance. With all their confidences, he had never told her much of his pecuniary circumstances in the world, but she was almost sure that he was a poor man. He had said as much as that to her, and in his letter desiring her to come to him at Shap, he had inserted a word or two purposely intended to prepare her mind for monetary considerations.

As she was jogged along over the rough road to Shap, she made up her mind that Aunt Greenow would be the proper person to defray the expense of the coming election. To give Kate her due, she would have given up every shilling of her own money without a moment's hesitation, or any feeling that her brother would be wrong to accept it. Nor would she, perhaps, have been unalterably opposed to his taking Alice's money, had Alice simply been his cousin. She felt that as Vavasors they were bound to stand by the fu-

ture head of the family in an attempt which was to be made, as she felt, for the general Vavasor interest. But she could not endure to think that her brother should take the money of the girl whom he was engaged to marry. Aunt Greenow's money she thought was fair game. Aunt Greenow herself had made various liberal offers to herself which Kate had declined, not caring to be under pecuniary obligations even to Aunt Greenow without necessity; but she felt that for such a purpose as her brother's contest she need not hesitate to ask for assistance, and she thought also that such assistance would be forthcoming.

"Grandpapa knows that you are here, George," said Kate, when their first greeting was over.

"The deuce he does! and why did you tell him?"

"I could not get the car to come in without letting him know why I wanted it."

"What nonsense! as if you could n't have made any excuse! I was particularly anxious that he should not guess that I am here."

"I don't see that it can make any difference, George."

"But I see that it can,—a very great difference. It may prevent my ever being able to get near him again before he dies. What did he say about my coming?"

"He did n't say much."

"He made no offer as to my going there?"

"No."

"I should not have gone if he had. I don't know now that I ever shall go. To be there to do any good,—so as to make him alter his will, and leave me in the position which I have a right to expect, would take more time than the whole property is worth. And he would endeavour to tie me down in some way I

could not stand;—perhaps ask me to give up my notion of going into Parliament."

"He might ask you, but he would not make it ground for another quarrel, if you refused."

"He is so unreasonable and ignorant that I am better away from him. But, Kate, you have not congratulated me on my matrimonial prospects."

"Indeed I did, George, when I wrote to you."

"Did you? well; I had forgotten. I don't know that any very strong congratulatory tone is necessary. As things go, perhaps it may be as well for all of us, and that 's about the best that can be said for it."

"Oh, George!"

"You see I 'm not romantic, Kate, as you are. Half-a-dozen children with a small income do not generally present themselves as being desirable to men who wish to push their way in the world."

"You know you have always longed to make her your wife."

"I don't know anything of the kind. You have always been under a match-making hallucination on that point. But in this case you have been so far successful, and are entitled to your triumph."

"I don't want any triumph; you ought to know that."

"But I 'll tell you what I do want, Kate. I want some money." Then he paused, but as she did not answer immediately, he was obliged to go on speaking. "I 'm not at all sure that I have not been wrong in making this attempt to get into Parliament,—that I 'm not struggling to pick fruit which is above my reach."

"Don't say that, George."

"Ah, but I can't help feeling it. I need hardly tell

you that I am ready to risk anything of my own. If I know myself I would toss up to-morrow, or for the matter of that to-day, between the gallows and a seat in the House. But I cannot go on with this contest by risking what is merely my own. Money, for immediate use, I have none left, and my neck, though I were ever so willing to risk it, is of no service."

"Whatever I have can be yours to-morrow," said Kate in a hesitating voice, which too plainly pronounced her misery as she made the offer. She could not refrain herself from making it. Though her grandfather's threat was ringing in her ears,—though she knew that she might be ruining her brother by proposing such a loan, she had no alternative. When her brother told her of his want of money, she could not abstain from tendering to him the use of what was her own.

"No," said he. "I shall not take your money."

"You would not scruple, if you knew how welcome you are."

"At any rate, I shall not take it. I should not think it right. All that you have would only just suffice for my present wants, and I should not choose to make you a beggar. There would, moreover, be a difficulty about readjusting the payment."

"There would be no difficulty, because no one need be consulted but us two."

"I should not think it right, and therefore let there be an end of it," said George, in a tone of voice which had in it something of magniloquence.

"What is it you wish then?" said Kate, who knew too well what he did wish.

"I will explain to you. When Alice and I am

married, of course there will be a settlement made on her, and as we are both the grandchildren of the old squire I shall propose that the Vavasor property shall be hers for life in the event of her outliving me."

"Well," said Kate.

"And if this be done, there can be no harm in my forestalling some of her property, which, under the circumstances of such a settlement, would of course become mine when we are married."

"But the squire might leave the property to whom he pleases."

"We know very well that he won't, at any rate, leave it out of the family. In fact, he would only be too glad to consent to such an agreement as that I have proposed, because he would thereby rob me of all power in the matter."

"But that could not be done till you are married."

"Look here, Kate;—don't you make difficulties." And now, as he looked at her, the cicature on his face seemed to open and yawn at her. "If you mean to say that you won't help me, do say so, and I will go back to London."

"I would do anything in my power to help you,—that was not wrong!"

"Yes; anybody could say as much as that. That is not much of an offer if you are to keep to yourself the power of deciding what is wrong. Will you write to Alice,—or better still, go to her, and explain that I want the money?"

"How can I go to London now?"

"You can do it very well, if you choose. But if that be too much, then write to her. It will come much better from you than from me; write to her, and ex-

plain that I must pay in advance the expenses of this contest, and that I cannot look for success unless I do so. I did not think that the demand would come so quick on me; but they know that I am not a man of capital, and therefore I cannot expect them to carry on the fight for me, unless they know that the money is sure. Scruby has been bitten two or three times by these metropolitan fellows, and he is determined that he will not be bitten again." Then he paused for Kate to speak.

"George," she said slowly.

"Well."

"I wish you would try any other scheme but that."

"There is no other scheme! That 's so like a woman;—to quarrel with the only plan that is practicable."

"I do not think you ought to take Alice's money."

"My dear Kate, you must allow me to be the best judge of what I ought to do, and what I ought not to do. Alice herself understands the matter perfectly. She knows that I cannot obtain this position, which is as desirable for her as it is for me——"

"And for me as much as for either," said Kate, interrupting him.

"Very well. Alice, I say, knows that I cannot do this without money, and has offered the assistance which I want. I would rather that you should tell her how much I want, and that I want it now, than that I should do so. That is all. If you are half the woman that I take you to be, you will understand this well enough."

Kate did understand it well enough. She was quite awake to the fact that her brother was ashamed of the thing he was about to do,—so much ashamed of it that

he was desirous of using her voice instead of his own. "I want you to write to her quite at once," he continued, "since you seem to think that it is not worth while to take the trouble of a journey to London."

"There is no question about the trouble," said Kate. "I would walk to London to get the money for you, if that were all."

"Do you think that Alice will refuse to lend it me?" said he, looking into her face.

"I am sure that she would not, but I think that you ought not to take it from her. There seems to me to be something sacred about property that belongs to the girl you are going to marry."

"If there is anything on earth I hate," said George, walking about the room, "it is romance. If you keep it for reading in your bedroom, it 's all very well for those who like it, but when it comes to be mixed up with one's business it plays the devil. If you would only sift what you have said, you would see what nonsense it is. Alice and I are to be man and wife. All our interests, and all our money, and our station in life, whatever it may be, are to be joint property. And yet she is the last person in the world to whom I ought to go for money to improve her prospects as well as my own. That 's what you call delicacy. I call it infernal nonsense."

"I tell you what I 'll do, George. I 'll ask Aunt Greenow to lend you the money,—or to lend it to me."

"I don't believe she 'd give me a shilling. Moreover, I want it quite immediately, and the time taken up in letter-writing and negotiations would be fatal to me. If you won't apply to Alice I must. I want you to tell me whether you will oblige me in this matter."

Kate was still hesitating as to her answer, when there came a knock at the door, and a little crumpled note was brought up to her. A boy had just come with it across the fell from Vavasor Hall, and Kate, as soon as she saw her name on the outside, knew that it was from her grandfather. It was as follows:—

"If George wishes to come to the Hall, let him come. If he chooses to tell me that he regrets his conduct to me, I will see him."

"What is it?" said George. Then Kate put the note into her brother's hand.

"I 'll do nothing of the kind," he said. "What good should I get by going to the old man's house?"

"Every good," said Kate. "If you don't go now you never can do so."

"Never till it 's my own," said George.

"If you show him that you are determined to be at variance with him, it never will be your own;—unless, indeed, it should some day come to you as part of Alice's fortune. Think of it, George; you would not like to receive everything from her."

He walked about the room, muttering maledictions between his teeth, and balancing, as best he was able at such a moment, his pride against his profit. "You have n't answered my question," said he. "If I go to the Hall, will you write to Alice?"

"No, George; I cannot write to Alice asking her for the money."

"You won't?"

"I could not bring myself to do it."

"Then, Kate, you and my grandfather may work together for the future. You may get him to leave you the place if you have skill enough."

"That is as undeserved a reproach as any woman ever encountered," said Kate, standing her ground boldly before him. "If you have either heart or conscience, you will feel that it is so."

"I 'm not much troubled with either one or the other, I fancy. Things are being brought to such a pass with me, that I am better without them."

"Will you take my money, George; just for the present?"

"No, I have n't much conscience; but I have a little left."

"Will you let me write to Mrs. Greenow?"

"I have not the slightest objection; but it will be of no use whatsoever."

"I will do so, at any rate. And now will you come to the Hall?"

"To beg that old fool's pardon? No; I won't. In the mood I am in at present, I could n't do it. I should only anger him worse than ever. Tell him that I 've business which calls me back to London at once."

"It is a thousand pities."

"It can't be helped."

"It may make so great a difference to you for your whole life!" urged Kate.

"I 'll tell you what I 'll do," said George. "I 'll go to Vavasor and put up with the old squire's insolence, if you 'll make this application for me to Alice." I wonder whether it occurred to him that his sister desired his presence at the Hall solely on his own behalf. The same idea certainly did not occur to Kate. She hesitated, feeling that she would almost do anything to achieve a reconciliation between her grandfather and her brother.

"But you 'll let me write to Aunt Greenow first," said she. "It will take only two days,—or at the most three?"

To this George consented as though he were yielding a great deal; and Kate, with a sore conscience, with a full knowledge that she was undertaking to do wrong, promised that she would apply to Alice for her money, if sufficient funds should not be forthcoming from Mrs. Greenow. Thereupon, George graciously consented to proceed to his bedroom, and put together his clothes with a view to his visit to the Hall.

"I thank Providence, Kate, that circumstances make it impossible for me to stay above two days. I have not linen to last me longer."

"We 'll manage that for you at the Hall."

"Indeed you won't do anything of the kind. And look, Kate, when I make that excuse don't you offer to do so. I will stay there over to-morrow night, and shall go into Kendal early, so as to catch the express train up on Thursday morning. Don't you throw me over by any counter-proposition."

Then they started together in the car, and very few words were said till they reached the old lodge, which stood at the entrance to the place. "Eh, Mr. George; be that you?" said the old woman who came out to swing back for them the broken gate. "A sight of you is good for sair een." It was the same welcome that the innkeeper had given him, and equally sincere. George had never made himself popular about the place, but he was the heir.

"I suppose you had better go into the drawing-room," said Kate, "while I go to my grandfather. You won't find a fire there."

"Manage it how you please; but don't keep me in the cold very long. Heavens, what a country house! The middle of January, and no fires in the rooms."

"And remember, George, when you see him you must say that you regret that you ever displeased him. Now that you are here, don't let there be any further misunderstanding."

"I think it very probable that there will be," said George. "I only hope he 'll let me have the old horse to take me back to Shap if there is. There he is at the front door, so I shan't have to go into the room without a fire."

The old man was standing at the Hall steps when the car drove up, as though to welcome his grandson. He put out his hand to help Kate down the steps, keeping his eye all the time on George's face.

"So you 've come back," the squire said to him.

"Yes, sir;—I 've come back,—like the prodigal son in the parable."

"The prodigal son was contrite. I hope you are so."

"Pretty well for that, sir. I 'm sorry there has been any quarrel, and all that, you know."

"Go in," said the squire, very angrily. "Go in. To expect anything gracious from you would be to expect pearls from swine. Go in."

George went in, shrugging his shoulders as his eyes met his sister's. It was in this fashion that the reconciliation took place between Squire Vavasor and his heir.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. CHEESACRE'S HOSPITALITY.

As the winter wore itself away, Mr. Cheesacre, happy as he was amidst the sports of Norfolk, and prosperous as he might be with the Augean spoils of Oilymead, fretted himself with an intense anxiety to bring to a close that affair which he had on his hands with the widow Greenow. There were two special dangers which disturbed him. She would give herself and all her money to that adventurer, Bellfield; or else she would spend her own money so fast before he got hold upon it, that the prize would be greatly damaged. "I 'm —— if she has n't been and set up a carriage!" he said to himself one day, as standing on the pavement of Tombland, in Norwich, he saw Mrs. Greenow issue forth from the Close in a private brougham, accompanied by one of the Fairstairs girls. "She 's been and set up her carriage as sure as my name 's Cheesacre!"

Whatever reason he might have to fear the former danger, we may declare that he had none whatever as to the latter. Mrs. Greenow knew what she was doing with her money as well as any lady in England. The private carriage was only a hired brougham taken by the month, and as to that boy in buttons whom she had lately established, why should she not keep a young servant, and call him a page, if it gave her any

comfort to do so? If Mr. Cheesacre had also known that she had lent the Fairstairs family fifty pounds to help them through with some difficulty which Joe had encountered with the Norwich tradespeople, he would have been beside himself with dismay. He desired to obtain the prize unmutilated,—in all its fair proportions. Any such clippings he regarded as robberies against himself.

But he feared Bellfield more than he feared the brougham. That all is fair in love and war was no doubt, at this period, Captain Bellfield's maxim, and we can only trust that he found in it some consolation, or ease to his conscience, in regard to the monstrous lies which he told his friend. In war, no doubt, all stratagems are fair. The one general is quite justified in making the other believe that he is far to the right, when in truth he is turning his enemy's left flank. If successful, he will be put upon a pedestal for his clever deceit, and crowned with laurels because of his lie. If Bellfield could only be successful, and achieve for himself the mastery over those forty thousand pounds, the world would forgive him, and place on his brow also some not uncomfortable crown. In the meantime, his stratagems were as deep and his lies as profound as those of any general.

It must not be supposed that Cheesacre ever believed him. In the first place, he knew that Bellfield was not a man to be believed in any way. Had he not been living on lies for the last ten years? But then a man may lie in such a way as to deceive, though no one believe him. Mr. Cheesacre was kept in an agony of doubt while Captain Bellfield occupied his lodgings in Norwich. He feed Jeannette liberally.

He even feed Charlie Fairstairs,—Miss Fairstairs I mean,—with gloves, and chickens from Oilymead, so that he might know whether that kite fluttered about his dovecote, and of what nature were the flutterings. He went even further than this, and feed the captain himself,—binding him down not to flutter as value given in return for such fees. He attempted even to fee the widow,—cautioning her against the fluttering, as he tendered to her, on his knees, a brooch as big as a breast-plate. She waved aside the breast-plate, declaring that the mourning-ring which contained poor Greenow's final grey lock of hair was the last article from a jeweller's shop which should ever find a place about her person. At the same time she declared that Captain Bellfield was nothing to her; Mr. Cheesacre need have no fears in that quarter. But then, she added, neither was he to have any hope. Her affections were all buried under the cold sod. This was harassing. Nevertheless, though no absolute satisfaction was to be attained in the wooing of Mrs. Greenow, there was a pleasantness in the occupation which ought to have reconciled her suitors to their destiny. With most ladies, when a gentleman has been on his knees before one of them in the morning, with outspoken protestations of love, with clearly defined proffers of marriage, with a minute inventory of the offerer's worldly wealth,—down even to the "mahogany-furnitured" bed-chambers, as was the case with Mr. Cheesacre, and when all these overtures have been peremptorily declined,—a gentleman in such a case, I say, would generally feel some awkwardness in sitting down to tea with the lady at the close of such a performance. But with Mrs. Greenow there was no such awkward-

ness. After an hour's work of the nature above described she would play the hostess with a genial hospitality, that eased off all the annoyance of disappointment; and then at the end of the evening, she would accept a squeeze of the hand, a good, palpable, long-protracted squeeze, with that sort of "don't;—have done now," by which Irish young ladies allure their lovers. Mr. Cheesacre, on such occasions, would leave the Close, swearing that she should be his on the next market-day,—or, at any rate, on the next Saturday. Then, on the Monday, tidings would reach him that Bellfield had passed all Sunday afternoon with his lady-love,—Bellfield, to whom he had lent five pounds on purpose that he might be enabled to spend that very Sunday with some officers of the Suffolk volunteers at Ipswich. And hearing this, he would walk out among those rich heaps, at the back of his farmyard, uttering deep curses against the falsehood of men and the fickleness of women.

Driven to despair, he at last resolved to ask Bellfield to come to Oilymead for a month. That drilling at Norwich, or the part of it which was supposed to be profitable, was wearing itself out. Funds were low with the captain,—as he did not scruple to tell his friend Cheesacre, and he accepted the invitation. "I 'll mount you with the harriers, old fellow," Cheesacre had said; "and give you a little shooting. Only I won't have you go out when I 'm not with you." Bellfield agreed. Each of them understood the nature of the bargain; though Bellfield, I think, had somewhat the clearer understanding in the matter. He would not be so near the widow as he had been at Norwich, but he would not be less near than his kind

host. And his host would no doubt watch him closely; —but then he also could watch his host. There was a railway station not two miles from Oilymead, and the journey thence into Norwich was one of half an hour. Mr. Cheesacre would doubtless be very jealous of such journeys, but with all his jealousy he could not prevent them. And then, in regard to this arrangement, Mr. Cheesacre paid the piper, whereas Captain Bellfield paid nothing. Would it not be sweet to him if he could carry off his friend's prize from under the very eaves of his friend's house?

And Mrs. Greenow also understood the arrangement. "Going to Oilymead, are you?" she said when Captain Bellfield came to tell her of his departure. Charlie Fairstairs was with her, so that the captain could not utilise the moment in any special way. "It 's quite delightful," continued the widow, "to see how fond you two gentlemen are of each other."

"I think gentlemen always like to go best to gentlemen's houses where there are no ladies," said Charlie Fairstairs, whose career in life had not as yet been satisfactory to her.

"As for that," said Bellfield, "I wish with all my heart that dear old Cheesy would get a wife. He wants a wife badly, if ever a man did, with all that house full of blankets and crockery. Why don't you set your cap at him, Miss Fairstairs?"

"What!—at a farmer?" said Charlie, who was particularly anxious that her dear friend, Mrs. Greenow, should not marry Mr. Cheesacre, and who weakly thought to belittle him accordingly.

"Give him my kind love," said Mrs. Greenow, thereby resenting the impotent interference. "And

look here, Captain Bellfield, suppose you both dine with me next Saturday. He always comes in on Saturday, and you might as well come too."

Captain Bellfield declared that he would only be too happy.

"And Charlie shall come to set her cap at Mr. Cheesacre," said the widow, turning a soft and gracious eye on the captain.

"I shall be happy to come," said Charlie, quite delighted; "but not with that object. Mr. Cheesacre is very respectable, I 'm sure." Charlie's mother had been the daughter of a small squire who had let his land to tenants, and she was, therefore, justified by circumstances in looking down upon a farmer.

The matter was so settled,—pending the consent of Mr. Cheesacre; and Bellfield went out to Oilymead. He knew the ways of the house, and was not surprised to find himself left alone till after dusk; nor was he much surprised when he learned that he was not put into one of the mahogany-furnitured chambers, but into a back room looking over the farmyard, in which there was no fireplace. The captain had already endured some of the evils of poverty, and could have put up with this easily had nothing been said about it. As it was, Cheesacre brought the matter forward, and apologised, and made the thing difficult.

"You see, old fellow," he said, "there are the rooms, and of course they 're empty. But it 's such a bore hauling out all the things and putting up the curtains. You 'll be very snug where you are."

"I shall do very well," said Bellfield, rather sulkily.

"Of course you 'll do very well. It 's the warmest room in the house in one way." He did not say in

what way. Perhaps the near neighbourhood of the stables may have had a warming effect.

Bellfield did not like it; but what is a poor man to do under such circumstances? So he went upstairs and washed his hands before dinner in the room without a fireplace, flattering himself that he would yet be even with his friend Cheesacre.

They dined together not in the best humour, and after dinner they sat down to enjoy themselves with pipes and brandy and water. Bellfield, having a taste for everything that was expensive, would have preferred cigars; but his friend put none upon the table. Mr. Cheesacre, though he could spend his money liberally when occasion required such spending, knew well the value of domestic economy. He was n't going to put himself out, as he called it, for Bellfield! What was good enough for himself was good enough for Bellfield. "A beggar, you know; just a regular beggar!" as he was betrayed into saying to Mrs. Greenow on some occasion just at this period. "Poor fellow! He only wants money to make him almost perfect," Mrs. Greenow had answered;—and Mr. Cheesacre had felt that he had made a mistake.

Both the men became talkative, if not good-humoured, under the effects of the brandy and water, and the captain then communicated Mrs. Greenow's invitation to Mr. Cheesacre. He had had his doubts as to the propriety of doing so,—thinking that perhaps it might be to his advantage to forget the message. But he reflected that he was at any rate a match for Cheesacre when they were present together, and finally came to the conclusion that the message should be delivered.

"I had to go and just wish her good-bye, you know," he said apologetically, as he finished his little speech.

"I don't see that at all," said Cheesacre.

"Why, my dear fellow, how foolishly jealous you are. If I were to be downright uncivil to her, as you would have me be, it would only call attention to the thing."

"I 'm not a bit jealous. A man who sits upon his own ground as I do has n't any occasion to be jealous."

"I don't know what your own ground has to do with it,—but we 'll let that pass."

"I think it has a great deal to do with it. If a man does intend to marry he ought to have things comfortable about him; unless he wants to live on his wife, which I look upon as about the meanest thing a man can do. By George, I 'd sooner break stones than that."

This was hard for any captain to bear,—even for Captain Bellfield; but he did bear it,—looking forward to revenge.

"There 's no pleasing you, I know," said he. "But there 's the fact. I went to say good-bye to her, and she asked me to give you that message. Shall we go or not?"

Cheesacre sat for some time silent, blowing out huge clouds of smoke while he meditated a little plan. "I 'll tell you what it is, Bellfield," he said at last. "She 's nothing to you, and if you won't mind it, I 'll go. Mrs. Jones shall get you anything you like for dinner, —and,—and,—I 'll stand you a bottle of the 34 port!"

But Captain Bellfield was not going to put up with this. He had not sold himself altogether to work Mr. Cheesacre's will. "No, old fellow," said he; "that cock won't fight. She has asked me to dine with her on

Saturday, and I mean to go. I don't intend that she shall think that I 'm afraid of her,—or of you either."

"You don't;—don't you?"

"No, I don't," said the captain stoutly.

"I wish you 'd pay me some of that money you owe me," said Cheesacre.

"So I will,—when I 've married the widow. Ha, —ha,—ha."

Cheesacre longed to turn him out of the house. Words to bid him go were, so to say, upon his tongue. But the man would only have taken himself to Norwich, and would have gone without any embargo upon his suit; all their treaties would then be at an end. "She knows a trick worth two of that," said Cheesacre at last.

"I dare say she does; and if so, why should n't I go and dine with her next Saturday?"

"I 'll tell you why,—because you 're in my way. The deuce is in it if I have n't made the whole thing clear enough. I 've told you all my plans because I thought you were my friend, and I 've paid you well to help me, too; and yet it seems to me you 'd do anything in your power to throw me over,—only you can't."

"What an ass you are," said the captain after a pause; "just you listen to me. That scraggy young woman, Charlie Fairstairs, is to be there of course."

"How do you know?"

"I tell you that I do know. She was present when the whole thing was arranged, and I heard her asked, and heard her say that she would come;—and for the matter of that I heard her declare that she would n't set her cap at you, because you 're a farmer."

"Upon my word she 's kind. Upon my word she is," said Cheesacre, getting very angry and very red. "Charlie Fairstairs, indeed! I would n't pick her out of a gutter with a pair of tongs. She ain't good enough for my bailiff, let alone me."

"But somebody must take her in hand on Saturday, if you 're to do any good," said the crafty Bellfield.

"What the deuce does she have that nasty creature there for?" said Cheesacre, who thought it very hard that everything should not be arranged exactly as he would desire.

"She wants a companion, of course. You can get rid of Charlie, you know, when you make her Mrs. Cheesacre."

"Get rid of her! You don't suppose she 'll ever put her foot in this house. Not if I know it. I 've detested that woman for the last ten years." Cheesacre could forgive no word of slight respecting his social position, and the idea of Miss Fairstairs having pretended to look down upon him, galled him to the quick.

"You 'll have to dine with her at any rate," said Bellfield, "and I always think that four are better company than three on such occasions."

Mr. Cheesacre grunted an unwilling assent, and after this it was looked upon as an arranged thing that they two should go into Norwich on the Saturday together, and that they should both dine with the widow. Indeed, Mrs. Greenow got two notes, one from each of them, accepting the invitation. Cheesacre wrote in the singular number, altogether ignoring Captain Bellfield, as he might have ignored his footman had he intended to take one. The captain condescended to use the

plural pronoun. "We shall be so happy to come," said he. "Dear old Cheesy is out of his little wits with delight," he added, "and has already began to polish off the effects of the farmyard."

"Effects of the farmyard," said Mrs. Greenow aloud, in Jeannette's hearing, when she received the note. "It would be well for Captain Bellfield if he had a few such effects himself."

"You can give him enough, ma'am," said Jeannette, "to make him a better man than Mr. Cheesacre any day. And for a gentleman——; of course I say nothing, but if I was a lady, I know which should be the man for me."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. GREENOW'S LITTLE DINNER IN THE CLOSE.

How deep and cunning are the wiles of love! When that Saturday morning arrived not a word was said by Cheesacre to his rival as to his plans for the day. "You 'll take the dog-cart in?" Captain Bellfield had asked overnight. "I don't know what I shall do as yet," replied he who was master of the house, of the dog-cart, and, as he fondly thought, of the situation. But Bellfield knew that Cheesacre must take the dog-cart, and was contented. His friend would leave him behind, if it were possible, but Bellfield would take care that it should not be possible.

Before breakfast Mr. Cheesacre surreptitiously carried out into the yard a bag containing all his apparatus for dressing,—his marrow oil for his hair, his shirt with the wondrous worked front upon an under-stratum of pink to give it colour, his shiny boots, and all the rest of the paraphernalia. When dining in Norwich on ordinary occasions, he simply washed his hands there, trusting to the chambermaid at the inn to find him a comb; and now he came down with his bag surreptitiously, and hid it away in the back of the dog-cart with secret, but alas, not unobserved hands, hoping that Bellfield would forget his toilet. But when did such a captain ever forget his outward man? Cheesacre, as he returned through the kitchen from the yard

into the front hall, perceived another bag lying near the door, apparently filled almost as well as his own.

"What the deuce are you going to do with all this luggage?" said he, giving the bag a kick.

"Put it where I saw you putting yours when I opened my window just now," said Bellfield.

"D—— the window," exclaimed Cheesacre, and then they sat down to breakfast. "How you do hack that ham about," he said. "If you ever found hams yourself you 'd be more particular in cutting them." This was very bad. Even Bellfield could not bear it with equanimity, and feeling unable to eat the ham under such circumstances, made his breakfast with a couple of fresh eggs. "If you did n't mean to eat the meat, why the mischief did you cut it?" said Cheesacre.

"Upon my word, Cheesacre, you 're too bad;—upon my word you are," said Bellfield, almost sobbing.

"What 's the matter now?" said the other.

"Who wants your ham?"

"You do, I suppose, or you would n't cut it."

"No, I don't;—nor anything else either that you 've got. It is n't fair to ask a fellow into your house, and then say such things to him as that. And it is n't what I 've been accustomed to either; I can tell you that, Mr. Cheesacre."

"Oh, bother!"

"It 's all very well to say bother, but I choose to be treated like a gentleman wherever I go. You and I have known each other a long time, and I 'd put up with more from you than from any one else; but——"

"Can you pay me the money that you owe me, Bellfield?" said Cheesacre, looking hard at him.

"No, I can't," said Bellfield; "not immediately."

"Then eat your breakfast, and hold your tongue."

After that Captain Bellfield did eat his breakfast,—leaving the ham, however, untouched, and did hold his tongue, vowing vengeance in his heart. But the two men went into Norwich more amicably together than they would have done had there been no words between them. Cheesacre felt that he had trespassed a little, and therefore offered the captain a cigar as he seated himself in the cart. Bellfield accepted the offering, and smoked the weed of peace.

"Now," said Cheesacre, as he drove into the Swan yard, "what do you mean to do with yourself all day?"

"I shall go down to the quarters, and look the fellows up."

"All right. But mind this, Bellfield;—it 's an understood thing, that you 're not to be in the Close before four?"

"I won't be in the Close before four!"

"Very well. That 's understood. If you deceive me, I 'll not drive you back to Oilymead to-night."

In this instance Captain Bellfield had no intention to deceive. He did not think it probable that he could do himself any good by philandering about the widow early in the day. She would be engaged with her dinner and with an early toilet. Captain Bellfield, moreover, had learned from experience that the first comer has not always an advantage in ladies' society. The mind of a woman is greedy after novelty, and it is upon the stranger, or upon the most strange of her slaves around her, that she often smiles the sweetest. The cathedral clock, therefore, had struck four before Captain Bellfield rang Mrs. Greenow's bell, and

then, when he was shown into the drawing-room, he found Cheesacre there alone, redolent with the marrow oil, and beautiful with the pink bosom.

"Have n't you seen her yet?" asked the captain almost in a whisper.

"No," said Cheesacre sulkily.

"Nor yet Charlie Fairstairs?"

"I 've seen nobody," said Cheesacre.

But at this moment he was compelled to swallow his anger, as Mrs. Greenow, accompanied by her lady guest, came into the room. "Whoever would have expected two gentlemen to be so punctual," said she, "especially on market-day!"

"Market-day makes no difference when I come to see you," said Cheesacre, putting his best foot forward, while Captain Bellfield contented himself with saying something civil to Charlie. He would bide his time and ride a waiting race.

The widow was almost gorgeous in her weeds. I believe that she had not sinned in her dress against any of those canons which the semi-ecclesiastical authorities on widowhood have laid down as to the outward garments fitted for gentleman's relicts. The materials were those which are devoted to the deepest conjugal grief. As regarded every item of the written law her suttee worship was carried out to the letter. There was the widow's cap, generally so hideous, so well known to the eyes of all men, so odious to womanhood. Let us hope that such headgear may have some assuaging effect on the departed spirits of husbands. There was the dress of deep, clinging, melancholy crape,—of crape which becomes so brown and so rusty, and which makes the six months' widow seem

so much more afflicted a creature than she whose husband is just gone, and whose crape is therefore new. There were the trailing weepers, and the widow's kerchief pinned close round her neck and somewhat tightly over her bosom. But there was that of genius about Mrs. Greenow, that she had turned every seeming disadvantage to some special profit, and had so dressed herself that though she had obeyed the law to the letter, she had thrown the spirit of it to the winds. Her cap sat jauntily on her head, and showed just so much of her rich brown hair as to give her the appearance of youth which she desired. Cheesacre had blamed her in his heart for her private carriage, but she spent more money, I think, on new crape than she did on her brougham. It never became brown and rusty with her, or formed itself into old lumpy folds, or shaped itself round her like a grave cloth. The written law had not interdicted crinoline, and she loomed as large with weeds, which with her were not sombre, as she would do with her silks when the period of her probation should be over. Her weepers were bright with newness, and she would waft them aside from her shoulder with an air which turned even them into auxiliaries. Her kerchief was fastened close round her neck and close over her bosom; but Jeannette well knew what she was doing as she fastened it,—and so did Jeannette's mistress.

Mrs. Greenow would still talk much about her husband, declaring that her loss was as fresh to her wounded heart, as though he, on whom all her happiness had rested, had left her only yesterday; but yet she mistook her dates, frequently referring to the melancholy circumstance as having taken place fifteen

months ago. In truth, however, Mr. Greenow had been alive within the last nine months,—as everybody around her knew. But if she chose to forget the exact day, why should her friends or dependants remind her of it? No friend or dependant did remind her of it, and Charlie Fairstairs spoke of the fifteen months with bold confidence,—false-tongued little parasite that she was.

"Looking well," said the widow, in answer to some outspoken compliment from Mr. Cheesacre. "Yes, I 'm well enough in health, and I suppose I ought to be thankful that it is so. But if you had buried a wife whom you had loved within the last eighteen months, you would have become as indifferent as I am to all that kind of thing."

"I never was married yet," said Mr. Cheesacre.

"And therefore you know nothing about it. Everything in the world is gay and fresh to you. If I were you, Mr. Cheesacre, I would not run the risk. It is hardly worth a woman's while, and I suppose not a man's. The sufferings are too great!" Whereupon she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"But I mean to try all the same," said Cheesacre, looking the lover all over as he gazed into the fair one's face.

"I hope that you may be successful, Mr. Cheesacre, and that she may not be torn away from you early in life. Is dinner ready, Jeannette? That 's well. Mr. Cheesacre, will you give your arm to Miss Fairstairs?"

There was no doubt as to Mrs. Greenow's correctness. As Captain Bellfield held, or had held, her Majesty's commission, he was clearly entitled to take the mistress of the festival down to dinner. But

Cheesacre would not look at it in this light. He would only remember that he had paid for the captain's food for some time past, that the captain had been brought into Norwich in his gig, that the captain owed him money, and ought, so to say, to be regarded as his property on the occasion. "I pay my way, and that ought to give a man higher station than being a beggarly captain,—which I don't believe he is, if all the truth was known." It was thus that he took an occasion to express himself to Miss Fairstairs on that very evening. "Military rank is always recognised," Miss Fairstairs had replied, taking Mr. Cheesacre's remarks as a direct slight upon herself. He had taken her down to dinner, and had then come to her complaining that he had been injured in being called upon to do so! "If you were a magistrate, Mr. Cheesacre, you would have rank; but I believe you are not." Charlie Fairstairs knew well what she was about. Mr. Cheesacre had striven much to get his name put upon the commission of the peace, but had failed. "Nasty, scraggy old cat," Cheesacre said to himself, as he turned away from her.

But Bellfield gained little by taking the widow down. He and Cheesacre were placed at the top and bottom of the table, so that they might do the work of carving; and the ladies sat at the sides. Mrs. Greenow's hospitality was very good. The dinner was exactly what a dinner ought to be for four persons. There was soup, fish, a cutlet, a roast fowl, and some game. Jeannette waited at table nimbly, and the thing could not have been done better. Mrs. Greenow's appetite was not injured by her grief, and she so far repressed for the time all remembrance of her sorrow

as to enable her to play the kind hostess to perfection. Under her immediate eye Cheesacre was forced into apparent cordiality with his friend Bellfield, and the captain himself took the good things which the gods provided with thankful good humour.

Nothing, however, was done at the dinner-table. No work got itself accomplished. The widow was so accurately fair in the adjustment of her favours, that even Jeannette could not perceive to which of the two she turned with the amplest smile. She talked herself and made others talk, till Cheesacre became almost comfortable, in spite of his jealousy. "And now," she said, as she got up to leave the room, when she had taken her own glass of wine, "we will allow these two gentlemen just half an hour, eh, Charlie? and then we shall expect them upstairs."

"Ten minutes will be enough for us here," said Cheesacre, who was in a hurry to utilise his time.

"Half an hour," said Mrs. Greenow, not without some little tone of command in her voice. Ten minutes might be enough for Mr. Cheesacre, but ten minutes was not enough for her.

Bellfield had opened the door, and it was upon him that the widow's eye glanced as she left the room. Cheesacre saw it, and resolved to resent the injury. "I 'll tell you what it is, Bellfield," he said, as he sat down moodily over the fire, "I won't have you coming here at all, till this matter is settled."

"Till what matter is settled?" said Bellfield, filling his glass.

"You know what matter I mean."

"You take such a deuce of a time about it."

"No, I don't. I take as little time as anybody

could. That other fellow has only been dead about nine months, and I 've got the thing in excellent training already."

"And what harm do I do?"

"You disturb me, and you disturb her. You do it on purpose. Do you suppose I can't see? I 'll tell you what, now; if you 'll go clean out of Norwich for a month, I 'll lend you two hundred pounds on the day she becomes Mrs. Cheesacre."

"And where am I to go to?"

"You may stay at Oilymead if you like;—that is, on condition that you do stay there."

"And be told that I hack the ham because it 's not my own. Shall I tell you a piece of my mind, Cheesacre?"

"What do you mean?"

"That woman has no more idea of marrying you than she has of marrying the Bishop. Won't you fill your glass, old fellow? I know where the tap is if you want another bottle. You may as well give it up, and spend no more money in pink fronts and polished boots on her account. You 're a podgy man, you see, and Mrs. Greenow does n't like podgy men."

Cheesacre sat looking at him with his mouth open, dumb with surprise, and almost paralysed with impotent anger. What had happened during the last few hours to change so entirely the tone of his dependant captain? Could it be that Bellfield had been there during the morning, and that she had accepted him?

"You are very podgy, Cheesacre," Bellfield continued, "and then you so often smell of the farmyard; and you talk too much of your money and your property. You 'd have had a better chance if you had

openly talked to her of hers,—as I have done. As it is, you have n't any chance at all."

Bellfield, as he thus spoke to the man opposite to him, went on drinking his wine comfortably, and seemed to be chuckling with glee. Cheesacre was so astounded, so lost in amazement that the creature whom he had fed,—whom he had bribed with money out of his own pocket, should thus turn against him, that for a while he could not collect his thoughts or find voice wherewith to make any answer. It occurred to him immediately that Bellfield was even now, at this very time, staying at his house,—that he, Cheesacre, was expected to drive him, Bellfield, back to Oilymead, to his own Oilymead, on this very evening; and as he thought of this he almost fancied that he must be in a dream. He shook himself, and looked again, and there sat Bellfield, eying him through the bright colour of a glass of port.

"Now I 've told you a bit of my mind, Cheesy, my boy," continued Bellfield, "and you 'll save yourself a deal of trouble and annoyance if you 'll believe what I say. She don't mean to marry you. It 's most probable that she 'll marry me; but, at any rate, she won't marry you."

"Do you mean to pay me my money, sir?" said Cheesacre, at last, finding his readiest means of attack in that quarter.

"Yes, I do."

"But when?"

"When I 've married Mrs. Greenow,—and, therefore, I expect your assistance in that little scheme. Let us drink her health. We shall always be delighted to see you at our house, Cheesy, my boy, and you

shall be allowed to hack the hams just as much as you please."

"You shall be made to pay for this," said Cheesacre, gasping with anger;—gasping almost more with dismay than he did with anger.

"All right, old fellow; I 'll pay for it,—with the widow's money. Come; our half-hour is nearly over; shall we go upstairs?"

"I 'll expose you."

"Don't now;—don't be ill-natured."

"Will you tell me where you mean to sleep to-night, Captain Bellfield?"

"If I sleep at Oilymead it will only be on condition that I have one of the mahogany-furnitured bedrooms."

"You 'll never put your foot in that house again. You 're a rascal, sir."

"Come, come, Cheesy, it won't do for us to quarrel in a lady's house. It would n't be the thing at all. You 're not drinking your wine. You might as well take another glass, and then we 'll go upstairs."

"You 've left your traps at Oilymead, and not one of them you shall have till you 've paid me every shilling you owe me. I don't believe you 've a shirt in the world beyond what you 've got there."

"It 's lucky I brought one in to change; is n't it, Cheesy? I should n't have thought of it, only for the hint you gave me. I might as well ring the bell for Jeannette to put away the wine, if you won't take any more." Then he rang the bell, and when Jeannette came he skipped lightly upstairs into the drawing-room.

"Was he here before to-day?" said Cheesacre, nod-

ding his head at the doorway through which Bellfield had passed.

"Who? The captain? Oh dear, no. The captain don't come here much now;—not to say often, by no means."

"He 's a confounded rascal."

"Oh, Mr. Cheesacre!" said Jeannette.

"He is;—and I ain't sure that there ain't others nearly as bad as he is."

"If you mean me, Mr. Cheesacre, I do declare you 're a wronging me; I do indeed."

"What 's the meaning of his going on in this way?"

"I don't know nothing of his ways, Mr. Cheesacre; but I 've been as true to you, sir;—so I have;—as true as true." And Jeannette put her handkerchief up to her eyes.

He moved to the door, and then a thought occurred to him. He put his hand to his trousers pocket, and turning back towards the girl, gave her half-a-crown. She curtsied as she took it, and then repeated her last words. "Yes, Mr. Cheesacre,—as true as true." Mr. Cheesacre said nothing further, but followed his enemy up to the drawing-room. "What game is up now, I wonder," said Jeannette to herself, when she was left alone. "They two 'll be cutting each other's throatses before they 've done, and then my missus will take the surwiver." But she made up her mind that Cheesacre should be the one to have his throat cut fatally, and that Bellfield should be the survivor.

Cheesacre, when he reached the drawing-room, found Bellfield sitting on the same sofa with Mrs. Greenow looking at a book of photographs which they both of them were handling together. The outside rim

of her widow's frill on one occasion touched the captain's whisker, and as it did so the captain looked up with a gratified expression of triumph. If any gentleman has ever seen the same thing under similar circumstances, he will understand that Cheesacre must have been annoyed.

"Yes," said Mrs. Greenow, waving her handkerchief, of which little but a two-inch-deep border seemed to be visible. Bellfield knew at once that it was not the same handkerchief which she had waved before they went down to dinner. "Yes,—there he is. It 's so like him." And then she apostrophised the carte de visite of the departed one. "Dear Greenow! dear husband! When my spirit is false to thee, let thine forget to visit me softly in my dreams. Thou wast unmatched among husbands. Whose tender kindness was ever equal to thine? whose sweet temper was ever so constant? whose manly care so all-sufficient?" While the words fell from her lips her little finger was touching Bellfield's little finger, as they held the book between them. Charlie Fairstairs and Mr. Cheesacre were watching her narrowly, and she knew that they were watching her. She was certainly a woman of great genius and of great courage.

Bellfield, moved by the eloquence of her words, looked with some interest at the photograph. There was represented there before him, a small, grey-looking, insignificant old man, with pig's eyes and a toothless mouth,—one who should never have been compelled to submit himself to the cruelty of the sun's portraiture! Another widow, even if she had kept in her book the photograph of such a husband, would have scrambled it over silently,—would have been ashamed to show it.

"Have you ever seen it, Mr. Cheesacre?" asked Mrs. Greenow. "It 's so like him."

"I saw it at Yarmouth," said Cheesacre, very sulkily.

"That you did not," said the lady with some dignity, and not a little of rebuke in her tone; "simply because it never was at Yarmouth. A larger one you may have seen, which I always keep, and always shall keep, close by my bedside."

"Not if I know it," said Captain Bellfield to himself. Then the widow punished Mr. Cheesacre for his sullenness by whispering a few words to the captain; and Cheesacre in his wrath turned to Charlie Fairstairs. Then it was that he spake out his mind about the captain's rank, and was snubbed by Charlie,—as was told a page or two back.

After that, coffee was brought to them, and here again Cheesacre in his ill-humour allowed the captain to out-manœuvre him. It was the captain who put the sugar into the cups, and handed them round. He even handed a cup to his enemy. "None for me, Captain Bellfield; many thanks for your politeness all the same," said Mr. Cheesacre; and Mrs. Greenow knew from the tone of his voice that there had been a quarrel.

Cheesacre, sitting then in his gloom, had resolved upon one thing,—or, I may perhaps say, upon two things. He had resolved that he would not leave the room that evening till Bellfield had left it; and that he would get a final answer from the widow, if not that night,—for he thought it very possible that they might both be sent away together,—then early after breakfast on the following morning. For the present, he had given up any idea of turning his time to good account.

He was not perhaps a coward, but he had not that special courage which enables a man to fight well under adverse circumstances. He had been cowed by the unexpected impertinence of his rival,—by the insolence of a man to whom he thought that he had obtained the power of being always himself as insolent as he pleased. He could not recover his ground quickly, or carry himself before his lady's eye as though he was unconscious of the wound he had received. So he sat silent, while Bellfield was discoursing fluently. He sat in silence, comforting himself with reflections on his own wealth, and on the poverty of the other, and promising himself a rich harvest of revenge when the moment should come in which he might tell Mrs. Greenow how absolutely that man was a beggar, a swindler, and a rascal.

And he was astonished when an opportunity for doing so came very quickly. Before the neighbouring clock had done striking seven, Bellfield rose from his chair to go. He first of all spoke a word of farewell to Miss Fairstairs; then he turned to his late host; "Good night, Cheesacre," he said, in the easiest tone in the world; after that he pressed the widow's hand and whispered his adieu.

"I thought you were staying at Oilymead?" said Mrs. Greenow.

"I came from there this morning," said the captain.

"But he is n't going back there, I can tell you," said Mr. Cheesacre.

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Greenow; "I hope there is nothing wrong."

"All as right as a trivet," said the captain; and then he was off.

"I promised mamma that I would be home by seven," said Charlie Fairstairs, rising from her chair. It cannot be supposed that she had any wish to oblige Mr. Cheesacre, and therefore this movement on her part must be regarded simply as done in kindness to Mrs. Greenow. She might be mistaken in supposing that Mrs. Greenow would desire to be left alone with Mr. Cheesacre; but it was clear to her that in this way she could give no offence, whereas it was quite possible that she might offend by remaining. A little after seven Mr. Cheesacre found himself alone with the lady.

"I 'm sorry to find," said she gravely, "that you two have quarrelled."

"Mrs. Greenow," said he, jumping up, and becoming on a sudden full of life, "that man is a downright swindler."

"Oh, Mr. Cheesacre!"

"He is. He 'll tell you that he was at Inkerman, but I believe he was in prison all the time." The captain had been arrested, I think twice, and thus Mr. Cheesacre justified to himself this assertion. "I doubt whether he ever saw a shot fired," he continued.

"He 's none the worse for that."

"But he tells such lies; and then he has not a penny in the world. How much do you suppose he owes me, now?"

"However much it is, I 'm sure you are too much of a gentleman to say."

"Well;—yes, I am," said he, trying to recover himself. "But when I asked him how he intended to pay me, what do you think he said? He said he 'd pay me when he got your money."

"My money! He could n't have said that!"

"But he did, Mrs. Greenow; I give you my word and honour. 'I 'll pay you when I get the widow's money,' he said."

"You gentlemen must have a nice way of talking about me when I am absent."

"I never said a disrespectful word about you in my life, Mrs. Greenow,—or thought one. He does;—he says horrible things."

"What horrible things, Mr. Cheesacre?"

"Oh, I can't tell you;—but he does. What can you expect from such a man as that, who, to my knowledge, won't have a change of clothes to-morrow, except what he brought in on his back this morning. Where he 's to get a bed to-night, I don't know, for I doubt whether he 's got half-a-crown in the world."

"Poor Bellfield!"

"Yes; he is poor."

"But how gracefully he carries his poverty."

"I should call it very disgraceful, Mrs. Greenow." To this she made no reply, and then he thought that he might begin his work. "Mrs. Greenow,—may I say Arabella?"

"Mr. Cheesacre!"

"But may n't I? Come, Mrs. Greenow. You know well enough by this time what it is I mean. What 's the use of shilly-shallying?"

"Shilly-shallying, Mr. Cheesacre! I never heard such language. If I bid you good night, now, and tell you that it is time for you to go home, shall you call that shilly-shallying?"

He had made a mistake in his word and repented it. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Greenow; I do indeed. I did n't mean anything offensive."

"Shilly-shallying, indeed! There 's very little shall in it, I can assure you."

The poor man was dreadfully crestfallen, so much so that the widow's heart relented, and she pardoned him. It was not in her nature to quarrel with people; —at any rate, not with her lovers. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Greenow," said the culprit humbly. "It is granted," said the widow; "but never tell a lady again that she is shilly-shallying. And look here, Mr. Cheesacre, if it should ever come to pass that you are making love to a lady in earnest——"

"I could n't be more in earnest," said he.

"That you are making love to a lady in earnest, talk to her a little more about your passion and a little less about your purse. Now, good night."

"But we are friends?"

"Oh yes; as good friends as ever."

Cheesacre, as he drove himself home in the dark, tried to console himself by thinking of the miserable plight in which Bellfield would find himself at Norwich, with no possessions but what he had brought into the town that day in a small bag. But as he turned in at his own gate he met two figures emerging; one of them was laden with a portmanteau, and the other with a hat case.

"It 's only me, Cheesy, my boy," said Bellfield. "I 've just come down by the rail to fetch my things, and I 'm going back to Norwich by the 9.20."

"If you 've stolen anything of mine I 'll have you prosecuted," roared Cheesacre, as he drove his gig up to his own door.

CHAPTER XV.

A NOBLE LORD DIES.

GEORGE VAVASOR remained about four days beneath his grandfather's roof; but he was not happy there himself, nor did he contribute to the happiness of any one else. He remained there in great discomfort so long, being unwilling to leave till an answer had been received to the request made to Aunt Greenow, in order that he might insist on Kate's performance of her promise with reference to Alice, if that answer should be unfavourable. During these five days Kate did all in her power to induce her brother to be, at any rate, kind in his manner towards his grandfather, but it was in vain. The squire would not be the first to be gracious; and George, quite as obstinate as the old man, would take no steps in that direction till encouraged to do so by graciousness from the other side. Poor Kate entreated each of them to begin, but her entreaties were of no avail. "He is an ill-mannered cub," the old man said, "and I was a fool to let him into the house. Don't mention his name to me again." George argued the matter more at length. Kate spoke to him of his own interest in the matter, urging upon him that he might, by such conduct, drive the squire to exclude him altogether from the property.

"He must do as he likes," George said sulkily.

"But for Alice's sake!" Kate answered.

"Alice would be the last to expect me to submit to unreasonable ill-usage for the sake of money. As regards myself, I confess that I 'm very fond of money and am not particularly squeamish. I would do anything that a man can do to secure it. But this I can't do. I never injured him, and I never asked him to injure himself. I never attempted to borrow money from him. I have never cost him a shilling. When I was in the wine business he might have enabled me to make a large fortune simply by settling on me then the reversion of property which, when he dies, ought to be my own. He was so perversely ignorant that he would make no inquiry, but chose to think that I was ruining myself, at the only time of my life when I was really doing well."

"But he had a right to act as he pleased," urged Kate.

"Certainly he had. But he had no right to resent my asking such a favour at his hands. He was an ignorant old fool not to do it; but I should never have quarrelled with him on that account. Nature made him a fool, and it was n't his fault. But I can't bring myself to kneel in the dirt before him simply because I asked for what was reasonable."

The two men said very little to each other. They were never alone together except during that half-hour after dinner in which they were supposed to drink their wine. The old squire always took three glasses of port during this period, and expected that his grandson would take three with him. But George would drink none at all. "I have given up drinking wine after dinner," said he, when his grandfather pushed the bottle over to him. "I suppose you mean that you drink

nothing but claret," said the squire, in a tone of voice that was certainly not conciliatory. "I mean simply what I say," said George—"that I have given up drinking wine after dinner." The old man could not openly quarrel with his heir on such a point as that. Even Mr. Vavasor could not tell his grandson that he was going to the dogs because he had become temperate. But, nevertheless, there was offence in it; and when George sat perfectly silent, looking at the fire, evidently determined to make no attempt at conversation, the offence grew, and became strong. "What the devil 's the use of your sitting there if you neither drink nor talk?" said the old man. "No use in the world, that I can see," said George; "if, however, I were to leave you, you would abuse me for it." "I don't care how soon you leave me," said the squire. From all which it may be seen that George Vavasor's visit to the Hall of his ancestors was not satisfactory.

On the fourth day, about noon, came Aunt Greenow's reply.

"Dearest Kate," she said, "I am not going to do what you ask me,"—thus rushing instantly into the middle of her subject. "You see, I don't know my nephew, and have no reason for being specially anxious that he should be in Parliament. I don't care two straws about the glory of the Vavasor family. If I had never done anything for myself, the Vavasors would have done very little for me. I don't care much about what you call 'blood.' I like those who like me, and whom I know. I am very fond of you, and because you have been good to me I would give you a thousand pounds if you wanted it for yourself; but I

don't see why I am to give my money to those I don't know. If it is necessary to tell my nephew of this, pray tell him that I mean no offence.

"Your friend C. is still waiting—waiting—waiting, patiently; but his patience may be exhausted.

"Your affectionate aunt,

"ARABELLA GREENOW."

"Of course she won't," said George, as he threw back the letter to his sister. "Why should she?"

"I had hoped she would," said Kate.

"Why should she? What did I ever do for her? She is a sensible woman. Who is your friend C., and why is he waiting patiently?"

"He is a man who would be glad to marry her for her money, if she would take him."

"Then what does she mean by his patience being exhausted?"

"It is her folly. She chooses to pretend to think that the man is a lover of mine."

"Has he got any money?"

"Yes; lots of money—or money's worth."

"And what is his name?"

"His name is Cheesacre. But pray don't trouble yourself to talk about him."

"If he wants to marry you, and has plenty of money, why should n't you take him?"

"Good heavens, George! In the first place he does not want to marry me. In the next place all his heart is in his farmyard."

"And a very good place to have it," said George.

"Undoubtedly. But, really, you must not trouble yourself to talk about him."

"Only this,—that I should be very glad to see you well married."

"Should you?" said she, thinking of her close attachment to himself.

"And, now, about the money," said George. "You must write to Alice at once."

"Oh, George!"

"Of course you must; you have promised. Indeed, it would have been much wiser if you had taken me at my word, and done it at once."

"I cannot do it."

Then the scar on his face opened itself, and his sister stood before him in fear and trembling. "Do you mean to tell me," said he, "that you will go back from your word, and deceive me;—that after having kept me here by this promise, you will not do what you have said you would do?"

"Take my money now, and pay me out of hers as soon as you are married. I will be the first to claim it from her,—and from you."

"That is nonsense."

"Why should it be nonsense? Surely you need have no scruple with me. I should have none with you if I wanted assistance."

"Look here, Kate; I won't have it, and there 's an end of it. All that you have in the world would not pull me through this election, and therefore such a loan would be worse than useless."

"And am I to ask her for more than two thousand pounds?"

"You are to ask her simply for one thousand. That is what I want, and must have, at present. And she knows that I want it, and that she is to supply it;

only she does not know that my need is so immediate. That you must explain to her."

"I would sooner burn my hand, George!"

"But burning your hand, unfortunately, won't do any good. Look here, Kate; I insist upon your doing this for me. If you do not, I shall do it, of course, myself; but I shall regard your refusal as an unjustifiable falsehood on your part, and shall certainly not see you afterwards. I do not wish, for reasons which you may well understand, to write to Alice myself on any subject at present. I now claim your promise to do so; and if you refuse, I shall know very well what to do."

Of course she did not persist in her refusal. With a sorrowful heart, and with fingers that could hardly form the needful letters, she did write a letter to her cousin, which explained the fact—that George Vavasor immediately wanted a thousand pounds for his electioneering purposes. It was a stiff, uncomfortable letter, unnatural in its phraseology, telling its own tale of grief and shame. Alice understood very plainly all the circumstances under which it was written, but she sent back word to Kate at once, undertaking that the money should be forthcoming; and she wrote again before the end of January, saying that the sum named had been paid to George's credit at his own bankers'.

Kate had taken immense pride in the renewal of the match between her brother and her cousin, and had rejoiced in it greatly as being her own work. But all that joy and pride were now over. She could no longer write triumphant notes to Alice, speaking always

of George as one who was to be their joint hero, foretelling great things of his career in Parliament, and saying little soft things of his enduring love. It was no longer possible to her now to write of George at all, and it was equally impossible to Alice. Indeed, no letters passed between them, when that monetary correspondence was over, up to the end of the winter. Kate remained down in Westmoreland, wretched and ill at ease, listening to hard words spoken by her grandfather against her brother, and feeling herself unable to take her brother's part as she had been wont to do in other times.

George returned to town at the end of those four days, and found that the thousand pounds was duly placed to his credit before the end of the month. It is hardly necessary to tell the reader that this money had come from the stores of Mr. Tombe, and that Mr. Tombe duly debited Mr. Grey with the amount. Alice, in accordance with her promise, had told her father that the money was needed, and her father, in accordance with his promise, had procured it without a word of remonstrance. "Surely I must sign some paper," Alice had said. But she had been contented when her father told her that the lawyers would manage all that.

It was nearly the end of February when George Vavasor made his first payment to Mr. Scruby on behalf on the coming election; and when he called at Mr. Scruby's office with this object, he received some intelligence which surprised him not a little.

"You have n't heard the news," said Scruby.

"What news?" said George.

"The Marquis is as nearly off the hooks as a man can be." Mr. Scruby, as he communicated the tidings, showed clearly by his face and voice that they were supposed to be of very great importance; but Vavasor did not at first seem to be as much interested in the fate of "the Marquis" as Scruby had intended.

"I 'm very sorry for him," said George. "Who is the Marquis? There 'll be sure to come another, so it don't much signify."

"There will come another, and that 's just it. It 's the Marquis of Bunratty; and if he drops, our young member will go into the Upper House."

"What, immediately, before the end of the session?" George, of course, knew well enough that such would be the case, but the effect which this event would have upon himself now struck him suddenly.

"To be sure," said Scruby. "The writ would be out immediately. I should be glad enough of it, only that I know that Travers's people have heard of it before us, and that they are ready to be up with their posters directly the breath is out of the Marquis's body. We must go to work immediately; that 's all."

"It will only be for a part of a session," said George.

"Just so," said Mr. Scruby.

"And then there 'll be the cost of another election."

"That 's true," said Mr. Scruby; "but in such cases we do manage to make it come a little cheaper. If you lick Travers now, it may be that you 'll have a walk over for the next."

"Have you seen Grimes?" asked George.

"Yes, I have; the blackguard! He is going to open his house on Travers's side. He came to me as bold as brass, and told me so, saying that he never

liked gentlemen who kept him waiting for his odd money. What angers me is that he ever got it."

"We have not managed it very well, certainly," said Vavasor, looking nastily at the attorney.

"We can't help those little accidents, Mr. Vavasor. There are worse accidents than that turn up almost daily in my business. You may think yourself almost lucky that I have n't gone over to Travers myself. He is a liberal, you know; and it has n't been for want of an offer, I can tell you."

Vavasor was inclined to doubt the extent of his luck in this respect, and was almost disposed to repent of his parliamentary ambition. He would now be called upon to spend certainly not less than three thousand pounds of his cousin's money on the chance of being able to sit in Parliament for a few months. And then, after what a fashion would he be compelled to negotiate that loan! He might, to be sure, allow the remainder of this session to run, and stand, as he had intended, at the general election; but he knew that if he now allowed a liberal to win the seat, the holder of the seat would be almost sure of subsequent success. He must either fight now, or give up the fight altogether; and he was a man who did not love to abandon any contest in which he had been engaged.

"Well, squire," said Scruby, "how is it to be?" And Vavasor felt that he detected in the man's voice some diminution of that respect with which he had hitherto been treated as a paying candidate for a metropolitan borough.

"This lord is not dead yet," said Vavasor.

"No; he 's not dead yet, that we have heard; but it won't do for us to wait. We want every minute of

time that we can get. There is n't any hope for him, I 'm told. It 's gout in the stomach, or dropsy at the heart, or some of those things that make a fellow safe to go."

"It won't do to wait for the next election?"

"If you ask me, I should say certainly not. Indeed, I should n't wish to have to conduct it under such circumstances. I hate a fight when there 's no chance of success. I grudge spending a man's money in such a case; I do indeed, Mr. Vavasor."

"I suppose Grimes's going over won't make much difference?"

"The blackguard! He 'll take a hundred and fifty votes, I suppose; perhaps more. But that is not much in such a constituency as the Chelsea districts. You see, Travers played mean at the last election, and that will be against him."

"But the conservatives will have a candidate."

"There 's no knowing; but I don't think they will. They 'll try one at the general, no doubt; but if the two sitting members can pull together, they won't have much of a chance."

Vavasor found himself compelled to say that he would stand; and Scruby undertook to give the initiatory orders at once, not waiting even till the Marquis should be dead. "We should have our houses open as soon as theirs," said he. "There 's a deal in that." So George Vavasor gave his orders. "If the worst comes to the worst," he said to himself, "I can always cut my throat."

As he walked from the attorney's office to his club he bethought himself that that might not unprobably be the necessary termination of his career. Everything

was going wrong with him. His grandfather, who was eighty years of age, would not die,—appeared to have no symptoms of dying;—whereas this Marquis, who was not yet much over fifty, was rushing headlong out of the world, simply because he was the one man whose continued life at the present moment would be serviceable to George Vavasor. As he thought of his grandfather he almost broke his umbrella by the vehemence with which he struck it against the pavement. What right could an ignorant old fool like that have to live forever, keeping possession of a property which he could not use, and ruining those who were to come after him? If now, at this moment, that wretched place down in Westmoreland could become his, he might yet ride triumphantly over his difficulties, and refrain from sullying his hands with more of his cousin's money till she should become his wife.

Even that thousand pounds had not passed through his hands without giving him much bitter suffering. As is always the case in such matters, the thing done was worse than the doing of it. He had taught himself to look at it lightly whilst it was yet unaccomplished; but he could not think of it lightly now. Kate had been right. It would have been better for him to take her money. Any money would have been better than that upon which he had laid his sacrilegious hands. If he could have cut a purse, after the old fashion, the stain of the deed would hardly have been so deep. In these days,—for more than a month, indeed, after his return from Westmoreland,—he did not go near Queen Anne Street, trying to persuade himself that he stayed away because of her coldness to him. But, in truth, he was afraid of seeing her with-

out speaking of her money, and afraid to see her if he were to speak of it.

"You have seen the Globe?" some one said to him as he entered the club.

"No, indeed; I have seen nothing."

"Bunratty died in Ireland this morning. I suppose you 'll be up for the Chelsea districts?"

CHAPTER XVI.

PARLIAMENT MEETS.

PARLIAMENT opened that year on the twelfth of February, and Mr. Palliser was one of the first members of the Lower House to take his seat. It had been generally asserted through the country, during the last week, that the existing Chancellor of the Exchequer had, so to say, ceased to exist as such; that though he still existed to the outer world, drawing his salary, and doing routine work, if a man so big can have any routine work to do,—he existed no longer in the inner world of the Cabinet. He had differed, men said, with his friend and chief, the Prime Minister, as to the expediency of repealing what were left of the direct taxes of the country, and was prepared to launch himself into opposition with his small body-guard of followers, with all his energy and with all his venom.

There is something very pleasant in the close, bosom friendship, and bitter, uncompromising animosity of these human gods,—of these human beings who would be gods were they not shorn so short of their divinity in that matter of immortality. If it were so arranged that the same persons were always friends, and the same persons were always enemies, as used to be the case among the dear old heathen gods and goddesses; —if Parliament were an Olympus in which Juno and Venus never kissed, the thing would not be nearly so

interesting. But in this Olympus partners are changed, the divine bosom, now rabid with hatred against some opposing deity, suddenly becomes replete with love towards its late enemy, and exciting changes occur which give to the whole thing all the keen interest of a sensational novel. No doubt this is greatly lessened for those who come too near the scene of action. Members of Parliament, and the friends of members of Parliament, are apt to teach themselves that it means nothing; that Lord This does not hate Mr. That, or think him a traitor to his country, or wish to crucify him; and that Sir John of the Treasury is not much in earnest when he speaks of his noble friend at the "Foreign Office" as a god to whom no other god was ever comparable in honesty, discretion, patriotism, and genius. But the outside Briton who takes a delight in politics,—and this description should include ninety-nine educated Englishmen out of every hundred,—should not be desirous of peeping behind the scenes. No beholder at any theatre should do so. It is good to believe in these friendships and these enmities, and very pleasant to watch their changes. It is delightful when Oxford embraces Manchester, finding that it cannot live without support in that quarter; and very delightful when the uncompromising assailant of all men in power receives the legitimate reward of his energy by being taken in among the bosoms of the blessed.

But although the outer world was so sure that the existing Chancellor of the Exchequer had ceased to exist, when the House of Commons met that gentleman took his seat on the Treasury Bench. Mr. Palliser, who had by no means given a general support to

the ministry in the last session, took his seat on the same side of the House indeed, but low down, and near to the cross benches. Mr. Bott sat close behind him, and men knew that Mr. Bott was a distinguished member of Mr. Palliser's party, whatever that party might be. Lord Cinquebars moved the Address, and I must confess that he did it very lamely. He was once accused by Mr. Maxwell, the brewer, of making a great noise in the hunting-field. The accusation could not be repeated as to his performance on this occasion, as no one could hear a word that he said. The Address was seconded by Mr. Loftus Fitzhoward, a nephew of the Duke of St. Bungay, who spoke as though he were resolved to trump poor Lord Cinquebars in every sentence which he pronounced,—as we so often hear the second clergyman from the Communion Table trumping his weary predecessor, who has just finished the Litany not in the clearest or most audible voice. Every word fell from Mr. Fitzhoward with the elaborate accuracy of a separate pistol-shot, and as he became pleased with himself in his progress, and warm with his work, he accented his words sharply, made rhetorical pauses, even moved his hands about in action, and quite disgusted his own party, who had been very well satisfied with Lord Cinquebars. There are many rocks which a young speaker in Parliament should avoid, but no rock which requires such careful avoiding as the rock of eloquence. Whatever may be his faults, let him at least avoid eloquence. He should not be inaccurate, which, however, is not much; he should not be long-winded, which is a good deal; he should not be ill-tempered, which is more; but none of these faults are so damnable as eloquence. All Mr.

Fitzhoward's friends and all his enemies knew that he had had his chance, and that he had thrown it away.

In the Queen's Speech there had been some very lukewarm allusion to remission of direct taxation. This remission, which had already been carried so far, should be carried further if such further carrying were found practicable. So had said the Queen. Those words, it was known, could not have been approved of by the energetic and still existing Chancellor of the Exchequer. On this subject the mover of the Address said never a word, and the seconder only a word or two. What they had said had, of course, been laid down for them; though, unfortunately, the manner of saying could not be so easily prescribed. Then there arose a great enemy, a man fluent of diction, apparently with deep malice at his heart, though at home,—as we used to say at school,—one of the most good-natured fellows in the world; one ambitious of that godship which a seat on the other side of the House bestowed, and greedy to grasp at the chances which this disagreement in the councils of the gods might give him. He was quite content, he said, to vote for the Address, as, he believed, would be all the gentlemen on his side of the House. No one could suspect them or him of giving a factious opposition to Government. Had they not borne and foreborne beyond all precedent known in that House? Then he touched lightly, and almost with grace to his opponents, on many subjects, promising support, and barely hinting that they were totally and manifestly wrong in all things. But—— Then the tone of his voice changed, and the well-known look of fury was assumed upon his countenance. Then great Jove on the other side

pulled his hat over his eyes, and smiled blandly. Then members put away the papers they had been reading for a moment, and men in the gallery began to listen. But—— The long and the short of it was this; that the existing Government had come into power on the cry of a reduction of taxation, and now they were going to shirk the responsibility of their own measures. They were going to shirk the responsibility of their own election cry, although it was known that their own Chancellor of the Exchequer was prepared to carry it out to the full. He was willing to carry it out to the full were he not restrained by the timidity, falsehood, and treachery of his colleagues, of whom, of course, the most timid, the most false, and the most treacherous was—the great god Jove, who sat blandly smiling on the other side.

No one should ever go near the House of Commons who wishes to enjoy all this. It was so manifestly evident that neither Jove nor any of his satellites cared twopence for what the irate gentleman was saying; nay, it became so evident that, in spite of his assumed fury, the gentleman was not irate. He intended to communicate his look of anger to the newspaper reports of his speech; and he knew from experience that he could succeed in that. And men walked about the House in the most telling moments,—enemies shaking hands with enemies,—in a way that showed an entire absence of all good, honest hatred among them. But the gentleman went on and finished his speech, demanding at last, in direct terms, that the Treasury Jove should state plainly to the House who was to be, and who was not to be, the bearer of the purse among the gods.

Then Treasury Jove got up smiling, and thanked his enemy for the cordiality of his support. "He had always," he said, "done the gentleman's party justice for their clemency, and had feared no opposition from them; and he was glad to find that he was correct in his anticipations as to the course they would pursue on the present occasion." He went on saying a good deal about home matters, and foreign matters, proving that everything was right, just as easily as his enemy had proved that everything was wrong. On all these points he was very full, and very courteous; but when he came to the subject of taxation, he simply repeated the passage from the Queen's Speech, expressing a hope that his right honourable friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, would be able to satisfy the judgment of the House, and the wishes of the people. That specially personal question which had been asked he did not answer at all.

But the House was still all agog, as was the crowded gallery. The energetic and still existing Chancellor of the Exchequer was then present, divided only by one little thin Secretary of State from Jove himself. Would he get up and declare his purposes? He was a man who almost always did get up when an opportunity offered itself,—or when it did not. Some second little gun was fired off from the Opposition benches, and then there was a pause. Would the purse-bearer of Olympus rise upon his wings and speak his mind, or would he sit in silence upon his cloud? There was a general call for the purse-bearer, but he floated in silence, and was inexplicable. The purse-bearer was not to be bullied into any sudden reading of the riddle. Then there came on a general debate about money

matters, in which the purse-bearer did say a few words, but he said nothing as to the great question at issue. At last up got Mr. Palliser, towards the close of the evening, and occupied a full hour in explaining what taxes the Government might remit with safety, and what they might not,—Mr. Bott, meanwhile, prompting him with figures from behind with an assiduity that was almost too persistent. According to Mr. Palliser, the words used in the Queen's Speech were not at all too cautious. The members went out gradually, and the House became very thin during this oration; but the newspapers declared, next morning, that his speech had been the speech of the night, and that the perspicuity of Mr. Palliser pointed him out as the coming man.

He returned home to his house in Park Lane quite triumphant after his success, and found Lady Glencora, at about twelve o'clock, sitting alone. She had arrived in town on that day, having come up at her own request, instead of remaining at Matching Priory till after Easter, as he had proposed. He had wished her to stay, in order, as he had said, that there might be a home for his cousins. But she had expressed herself unwilling to remain without him, explaining that the cousins might have the home in her absence, as well as they could in her presence; and he had given way. But, in truth, she had learned to hate her cousin Iphy Palliser with a hatred that was unreasonable,—seeing that she did not also hate Alice Vavasor, who had done as much to merit her hatred as had her cousin. Lady Glencora knew by what means her absence from Monkshade had been brought about. Miss Palliser had told her all that had passed in Alice's bedroom on the last night of Alice's stay at Matching, and had, by

so doing, contrived to prevent the visit. Lady Glencora understood well all that Alice had said; and yet, though she hated Miss Palliser for what had been done, she entertained no anger against Alice. Of course Alice would have prevented that visit to Monkshade if it were in her power to do so. Of course she would save her friend. It is hardly too much to say that Lady Glencora looked to Alice to save her. Nevertheless she hated Iphy Palliser for engaging herself in the same business. Lady Glencora looked to Alice to save her, and yet it may be doubted whether she did, in truth, wish to be saved.

While she was at Matching, and before Mr. Palliser had returned from Monkshade, a letter reached her, by what means she had never learned. "A letter has been placed within my writing-case," she said to her maid, quite openly. "Who put it there?" The maid had declared her ignorance in a manner that had satisfied Lady Glencora of her truth. "If such a thing happens again," said Lady Glencora, "I shall be obliged to have the matter investigated. I cannot allow that anything should be put into my room surreptitiously." There then had been an end of that, as regarded any steps taken by Lady Glencora. The letter had been from Burgo Fitzgerald, and had contained a direct proposal that she should go off with him. "I am at Matching," the letter said, "at the inn; but I do not dare to show myself, lest I should do you an injury. I walked round the house yesterday, at night, and I know that I saw your room. If I am wrong in thinking that you love me, I would not for worlds insult you by my presence; but if you love me still, I ask you to throw aside from you that ficti-

tious marriage, and give yourself to the man whom, if you love him, you should regard as your husband." There had been more of it, but it had been to the same effect. To Lady Glencora it had seemed to convey an assurance of devoted love,—of that love which, in former days, her friends had told her was not within the compass of Burgo's nature. He had not asked her to meet him then, but saying that he would return to Matching after Parliament was met, begged her to let him have some means of knowing whether her heart was true to him.

She told no one of the letter, but she kept it, and read it over and over again in the silence and solitude of her room. She felt that she was guilty in thus reading it,—even in keeping it from her husband's knowledge; but though conscious of this guilt, though resolute almost in its commission, still she determined not to remain at Matching after her husband's departure,—not to undergo the danger of remaining there while Burgo Fitzgerald should be in the vicinity. She could not analyse her own wishes. She often told herself, as she had told Alice, that it would be better for them all that she should go away; that in throwing herself even to the dogs, if such must be the result, she would do more of good than of harm. She declared to herself, in the most passionate words she could use, that she loved this man with all her heart. She protested that the fault would not be hers, but theirs who had forced her to marry the man she did not love. She assured herself that her husband had no affection for her, and that their marriage was in every respect prejudicial to him. She recurred over and over again, in her thoughts, to her own childlessness, and to his extreme desire for an

heir. "Though I do sacrifice myself," she would say, "I shall do more of good than harm, and I cannot be more wretched than I am now." But yet she fled to London because she feared to leave herself at Matching when Burgo Fitzgerald should be there. She sent no answer to his letter. She made no preparation for going with him. She longed to see Alice, to whom alone, since her marriage, had she ever spoken of her love, and intended to tell her the whole tale of that letter. She was as one who, in madness, was resolute to throw herself from a precipice, but to whom some remnant of sanity remained which forced her to seek those who would save her from herself.

Mr. Palliser had not seen her since her arrival in London, and, of course, he took her by the hand and kissed her. But it was the embrace of a brother rather than of a lover or a husband. Lady Glencora, with her full woman's nature, understood this thoroughly, and appreciated by instinct the true bearing of every touch from his hand. "I hope you are well?" she said.

"Oh yes; quite well. And you? A little fatigued with your journey, I suppose?"

"No; not much."

"Well, we have had a debate on the Address. Don't you want to know how it has gone?"

"If it has concerned you particularly, I do, of course."

"Concerned me! It has concerned me certainly."

"They have n't appointed you yet; have they?"

"No; they don't appoint people during debates, in the House of Commons. But I fear I shall never make you a politician."

"I 'm almost afraid you never will. But I 'm not

the less anxious for your success, since you wish it yourself. I don't understand why you should work so very hard; but, as you like it, I 'm as anxious as anybody can be that you should triumph."

"Yes; I do like it," he said. "A man must like something, and I don't know what there is to like better. Some people can eat and drink all day; and some people can care about a horse. I can do neither."

And there were others, Lady Glencora thought, who could love to lie in the sun, and could look up into the eyes of women, and seek their happiness there. She was sure, at any rate, that she knew one such. But she said nothing of this.

"I spoke for a moment to Lord Brock," said Mr. Palliser. Lord Brock was the name by which the present Jove of the Treasury was known among men.

"And what did Lord Brock say?"

"He did n't say much, but he was very cordial."

"But I thought, Plantagenet, that he could appoint you if he pleased? Does n't he do it all?"

"Well, in one sense, he does. But I don't suppose I shall ever make you understand." He endeavoured, however, to do so on the present occasion, and gave her a somewhat longer lecture on the working of the British Constitution, and the manner in which British politics evolved themselves, than would have been expected from most young husbands to their young wives under similar circumstances. Lady Glencora yawned, and strove lustily, but ineffectually, to hide her yawn in her handkerchief.

"But I see you don't care a bit about it," said he peevishly.

"Don't be angry, Plantagenet. Indeed I do care about it, but I am so ignorant that I can't understand it all at once. I am rather tired, and I think I 'll go to bed now. Shall you be late?"

"No, not very; that is, I shall be rather late. I 've a lot of letters I want to write to-night, as I must be at work all to-morrow. By-the-bye, Mr. Bott is coming to dine here. There will be no one else." The next day was a Wednesday, and the House would not sit in the evening.

"Mr. Bott!" said Lady Glencora, showing by her voice that she anticipated no pleasure from that gentleman's company.

"Yes, Mr. Bott. Have you any objection?"

"Oh no. Would you like to dine alone with him?"

"Why should I dine alone with him? Why should n't you eat your dinner with us? I hope you are not going to become fastidious, and to turn up your nose at people. Mrs. Marsham is in town, and I dare say she 'll come to you if you ask her."

But this was too much for Lady Glencora. She was disposed to be mild, but she could not endure to have her two duennas thus brought upon her together on the first day of her arrival in London. And Mrs. Marsham would be worse than Mr. Bott. Mr. Bott would be engaged with Mr. Palliser during the greater part of the evening. "I thought," said she, "of asking my cousin, Alice Vavasor, to spend the evening with me."

"Miss Vavasor!" said the husband. "I must say that I thought Miss Vavasor——" He was going to make some allusion to that unfortunate hour spent among the ruins, but he stopped himself.

"I hope you have nothing to say against my cousin?" said his wife. "She is my only near relative that I really care for;—the only woman, I mean."

"No; I don't mean to say anything against her. She's very well as a young lady, I dare say. I would sooner that you would ask Mrs. Marsham to-morrow."

Lady Glencora was standing, waiting to go away to her own room, but it was absolutely necessary that this matter should be decided before she went. She felt that he was hard to her, and unreasonable, and that he was treating her like a child who should not be allowed her own way in anything. She had endeavoured to please him, and, having failed, was not now disposed to give way.

"As there will be no other ladies here to-morrow evening, Plantagenet, and as I have not yet seen Alice since I have been in town, I wish you would let me have my way in this. Of course I cannot have very much to say to Mrs. Marsham, who is an old woman."

"I especially want Mrs. Marsham to be your friend," said he.

"Friendships will not come by ordering, Plantagenet," said she.

"Very well," said he. "Of course, you will do as you please. I am sorry that you have refused the first favour I have asked you this year." Then he left the room, and she went away to bed.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. MARSHAM.

But Lady Glencora was not brought to repentance by her husband's last words. It seemed to her to be so intolerably cruel, this demand of his, that she should be made to pass the whole of her first evening in town with an old woman for whom it was impossible that she should entertain the slightest regard, that she resolved upon rebellion. Had he positively ordered Mrs. Marsham, she would have sent for that lady, and have contented herself with enduring her presence in disdainful silence; but Mr. Palliser had not given any order. He had made a request, and a request, from its very nature, admits of no obedience. The compliance with a request must be voluntary, and she would not send for Mrs. Marsham, except upon compulsion. Had not she also made a request to him, and had not he refused it? It was his prerogative, undoubtedly, to command; but in that matter of requests she had a right to expect that her voice should be as potent as his own. She wrote a line, therefore, to Alice before she went to bed, begging her cousin to come to her early on the following day, so that they might go out together, and then afterwards dine in company with Mr. Bott.

"I know that will be an inducement to you," Lady Glencora said, "because your generous heart will feel

of what service you may be to me. Nobody else will be here,—unless, indeed, Mrs. Marsham should be asked, unknown to myself."

Then she sat herself down to think,—to think especially about the cruelty of husbands. She had been told over and over again, in the days before her marriage, that Burgo would ill-use her if he became her husband. The Marquis of Auld Reekie had gone so far as to suggest that Burgo might probably beat her. But what hard treatment, even what beating, could be so unendurable as this total want of sympathy, as this deadness in life, which her present lot entailed upon her? As for that matter of beating, she ridiculed the idea in her very soul. She sat smiling at the absurdity of the thing as she thought of the beauty of Burgo's eyes, of the softness of his touch, of the loving, almost worshipping, tones of his voice. Would it not even be better to be beaten by him than to have politics explained to her at one o'clock at night by such a husband as Plantagenet Palliser? The British Constitution, indeed! Had she married Burgo they would have been in sunny Italy, and he would have told her some other tale than that as they sat together under the pale moonlight. She had a little water-coloured drawing called Raphael and Fornarina, and she was infantine enough to tell herself that the so-called Raphael was like her Burgo,—no, not her Burgo, but the Burgo that was not hers. At any rate, all the romance of the picture she might have enjoyed had they allowed her to dispose as she had wished of her own hand. She might have sat in marble balconies, while the vines clustered over her head, and he would have been at her knee, hardly speaking to her, but making his presence felt

by the halo of its divinity. He would have called upon her for no hard replies. With him near her she would have enjoyed the soft air, and would have sat happy, without trouble, lapped in the delight of loving. It was thus that Fornarina sat. And why should not such a lot have been hers? Her Raphael would have loved her, let them say what they would about his cruelty.

Poor, wretched, overburthened child, to whom the commonest lessons of life had not yet been taught, and who had now fallen into the hands of one who was so ill-fitted to teach them! Who would not pity her? Who could say that the fault was hers? The world had laden her with wealth till she had had no limb free for its ordinary uses, and then had turned her loose to run her race!

"Have you written to your cousin?" her husband asked her the next morning. His voice, as he spoke, clearly showed that his anger was either over or suppressed.

"Yes; I have asked her to come and drive, and then to stay for dinner. I shall send the carriage for her if she can come. The man is to wait for an answer."

"Very well," said Mr. Palliser mildly. And then, after a short pause, he added, "As that is settled, perhaps you would have no objection to asking Mrs. Marsham also?"

"Won't she probably be engaged?"

"No; I think not," said Mr. Palliser. And then he added, being ashamed of the tinge of falsehood of which he would otherwise have been guilty, "I know she is not engaged."

"She expects to come, then?" said Lady Glencora.

"I have not asked her, if you mean that, Glencora. Had I done so, I should have said so. I told her that I did not know what your engagements were."

"I will write to her, if you please," said the wife, who felt that she could hardly refuse any longer.

"Do, my dear!" said the husband. So Lady Glencora did write to Mrs. Marsham, who promised to come,—as did also Alice Vavasor.

Lady Glencora would, at any rate, have Alice to herself for some hours before dinner. At first she took comfort in that reflection; but after a while she bethought herself that she would not know what to tell Alice, or what not to tell. Did she mean to show that letter to her cousin? If she did show it, then,—so she argued with herself,—she must bring herself to endure the wretchedness of her present lot, and must give up forever all her dreams about Raphael and Fornarina. If she did not show it,—or, at any rate, tell of it,—then it would come to pass that she would leave her husband under the protection of another man, and she would become—what she did not dare to name even to herself. She declared that so it must be. She knew that she would go with Burgo, should he ever come to her with the means of going at his and her instant command. But should she bring herself to let Alice know that such a letter had been conveyed to her, Burgo would never have such power.

I remember the story of a case of abduction in which a man was tried for his life, and was acquitted, because the lady had acquiesced in the carrying away while it was in progress. She had, as she herself declared, armed herself with a sure and certain charm or talisman

against such dangers, which she kept suspended round her neck; but whilst she was in the post-chaise she opened the window and threw the charm from her, no longer desiring, as the learned counsel for the defence efficiently alleged, to be kept under the bonds of such protection. Lady Glencora's state of mind was, in its nature, nearly the same as that of the lady in the post-chaise. Whether or no she would use her charm, she had not yet decided, but the power of doing so was still hers.

Alice came, and the greeting between the cousins was very affectionate. Lady Glencora received her as though they had been playmates from early childhood; and Alice, though such impulsive love was not natural to her as to the other, could not bring herself to be cold to one who was so warm to her. Indeed, had she not promised her love in that meeting at Matching Priory in which her cousin had told her of all her wretchedness? "I will love you," Alice had said; and though there was much in Lady Glencora that she could not approve,—much even that she could not bring herself to like,—still she would not allow her heart to contradict her words.

They sat so long over the fire in the drawing-room that at last they agreed that the driving should be abandoned.

"What 's the use of it?" said Lady Glencora. "There 's nothing to see, and the wind is as cold as charity. We are much more comfortable here; are we not?" Alice quite acquiesced in this, having no great desire to be driven through the parks in the gloom of a February afternoon.

"If I had Dandy and Flirt up here, there would be

some fun in it; but Mr. Palliser does n't wish me to drive in London."

"I suppose it would be dangerous?"

"Not in the least. I don't think it 's that he minds; but he has an idea that it looks fast."

"So it does. If I were a man, I 'm sure I should n't like my wife to drive horses about London."

"And why not? Just because you 'd be a tyrant,—like other husbands? What 's the harm of looking fast, if one does n't do anything improper? Poor Dandy, and dear Flirt! I 'm sure they 'd like it."

"Perhaps Mr. Palliser does n't care for that?"

"I can tell you something else he does n't care for. He does n't care whether Dandy's mistress likes it."

"Don't say that, Glencora."

"Why not say it,—to you?"

"Don't teach yourself to think it. That 's what I mean. I believe he would consent to anything that he did n't think wrong."

"Such as lectures about the British Constitution! But never mind about that, Alice. Of course the British Constitution is everything to him, and I wish I knew more about it;—that 's all. But I have n't told you whom you are to meet at dinner."

"Yes, you have—Mr. Bott."

"But there 's another guest, a Mrs. Marsham. I thought I 'd got rid of her for to-day, when I wrote to you; but I had n't. She 's coming."

"She won't hurt me at all," said Alice.

"She will hurt me very much. She 'll destroy the pleasure of our whole evening. I do believe that she hates you, and that she thinks you instigate me to all manner of iniquity. What fools they all are!"

"Who are they all, Glencora?"

"She and that man, and——. Never mind. It makes me sick when I think that they should be so blind. Alice, I hardly know how much I owe to you; I don't, indeed. Everything, I believe." Lady Glencora, as she spoke, put her hand into her pocket, and grasped the letter which lay there.

"That 's nonsense," said Alice.

"No; it 's not nonsense. Who do you think came to Matching when I was there?"

"What—to the house?" said Alice, feeling almost certain that Mr. Fitzgerald was the person to whom Lady Glencora was alluding.

"No; not to the house."

"If it is the person of whom I am thinking," said Alice solemnly, "let me implore you not to speak of him."

"And why should I not speak of him? Did I not speak of him before to you, and was it not for good? How are you to be my friend, if I may not speak to you of everything?"

"But you should not think of him."

"What nonsense you talk, Alice! Not think of him! How is one to help one's thoughts? Look here."

Her hand was on the letter, and it would have been out in a moment, and thrown upon Alice's lap, had not the servant opened the door and announced Mrs. Marsham.

"Oh, how I do wish we had gone to drive!" said Lady Glencora, in a voice which the servant certainly heard, and which Mrs. Marsham would have heard had she not been a little hard of hearing,—in her bonnet.

"How do, my dear?" said Mrs. Marsham. "I

thought I 'd just come across from Norfolk Street and see you, though I am coming to dinner in the evening. It 's only just a step, you know. How d' ye do, Miss Vavasor?" and she made a salutation to Alice which was nearly as cold as it could be.

Mrs. Marsham was a woman who had many good points. She was poor, and bore her poverty without complaint. She was connected by blood and friendship with people rich and titled; but she paid to none of them egregious respect on account of their wealth or titles. She was staunch in her friendships, and staunch in her enmities. She was no fool, and knew well what was going on in the world. She could talk about the last novel, or—if need be—about the Constitution. She had been a true wife, though sometimes too strong-minded, and a painstaking mother, whose children, however, had never loved her as most mothers like to be loved.

The catalogue of her faults must be quite as long as that of her virtues. She was one of those women who are ambitious of power, and not very scrupulous as to the manner in which they obtain it. She was hard-hearted, and capable of pursuing an object without much regard to the injury she might do. She would not flatter wealth or fawn before a title, but she was not above any artifice by which she might ingratiate herself with those whom it suited her purpose to conciliate. She thought evil rather than good. She was herself untrue in action, if not absolutely in word. I do not say that she would coin lies, but she would willingly leave false impressions. She had been the bosom friend, and in many things the guide in life, of Mr. Palliser's mother; and she took a special interest in

Mr. Palliser's welfare. When he married, she heard the story of the loves of Burgo and Lady Glencora; and though she thought well of the money, she was not disposed to think very well of the bride. She made up her mind that the young lady would want watching, and she was of opinion that no one would be so well able to watch Lady Glencora as herself. She had not plainly opened her mind on this matter to Mr. Palliser; she had not made any distinct suggestion to him that she would act as Argus to his wife. Mr. Palliser would have rejected any such suggestion, and Mrs. Marsham knew that he would do so; but she had let a word or two drop, hinting that Lady Glencora was very young,—hinting that Lady Glencora's manners were charming in their childlike simplicity; but hinting also that precaution was, for that reason, the more necessary. Mr. Palliser, who suspected nothing as to Burgo or as to any other special peril, whose whole disposition was void of suspicion, whose dry nature realised neither the delights nor the dangers of love, acknowledged that Glencora was young. He especially wished that she should be discreet and matronly; he feared no lovers, but he feared that she might do silly things,—that she would catch cold,—and not know how to live a life becoming the wife of a Chancellor of the Exchequer. Therefore he submitted Glencora,—and, to a certain extent, himself,—into the hands of Mrs. Marsham.

Lady Glencora had not been twenty-four hours in the house with this lady before she recognised in her a duenna. In all such matters no one could be quicker than Lady Glencora. She might be very ignorant about the British Constitution, and, alas! very ignorant

also as to the real elements of right and wrong in a woman's conduct, but she was no fool. She had an eye that could see, and an ear that could understand, and an abundance of that feminine instinct which teaches a woman to know her friend or her enemy at a glance, at a touch, at a word. In many things Lady Glencora was much quicker, much more clever, than her husband, though he was to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, and though she did know nothing of the Constitution. She knew, too, that he was easily to be deceived,—that though his intelligence was keen, his instincts were dull,—that he was gifted with no fineness of touch, with no subtle appreciation of the characters of men and women; and, to a certain extent, she looked down upon him for this obtusity. He should have been aware that Burgo was a danger to be avoided; and he should have been aware also that Mrs. Marsham was a duenna not to be employed. When a woman knows that she is guarded by a watch-dog, she is bound to deceive her Cerberus, if it be possible, and is usually not ill-disposed to deceive also the owner of Cerberus. Lady Glencora felt that Mrs. Marsham was her Cerberus, and she was heartily resolved that if she was to be kept in the proper line at all, she would not be so kept by Mrs. Marsham.

Alice rose and accepted Mrs. Marsham's salutation quite as coldly as it had been given, and from that time forward those two ladies were enemies. Mrs. Marsham, groping quite in the dark, partly guessed that Alice had in some way interfered to prevent Lady Glencora's visit to Monkshade, and though such prevention was, no doubt, good in that lady's eyes, she resented the interference. She had made up her mind

that Alice was not the sort of friend that Lady Glencora should have about her. Alice recognised and accepted the feud.

"I thought I might find you at home," said Mrs. Marsham, "as I know you are lazy about going out in the cold,—unless it be for a foolish midnight ramble," and Mrs. Marsham shook her head. She was a little woman, with sharp small eyes, with a permanent colour in her face, and two short, crisp, grey curls at each side of her face; always well dressed, always in good health, and, as Lady Glencora believed, altogether incapable of fatigue.

"The ramble you speak of was very wise, I think," said Lady Glencora; "but I never could see the use of driving about in London in the middle of winter."

"One ought to go out of the house every day," said Mrs. Marsham.

"I hate all those rules. Don't you, Alice?" Alice did not hate them, therefore she said nothing.

"My dear Glencora, one must live by rules in this life. You might as well say that you hated sitting down to dinner."

"So I do, very often; almost always when there 's company."

"You 'll get over that feeling after another season in town," said Mrs. Marsham, pretending to suppose that Lady Glencora alluded to some remaining timidity in receiving her own guests.

"Upon my word I don't think I shall. It 's a thing that seems always to be getting more grievous, instead of less so. Mr. Bott is coming to dine here to-night."

There was no mistaking the meaning of this. There was no pretending even to mistake it. Now Mrs.

Marsham had accepted the right hand of fellowship from Mr. Bott,—not because she especially liked him, but in compliance with the apparent necessities of Mr. Palliser's position. Mr. Bott had made good his ground about Mr. Palliser; and Mrs. Marsham, as she was not strong enough to turn him off from it, had given him the right hand of fellowship.

"Mr. Bott is a member of Parliament, and a very serviceable friend of Mr. Palliser's," said Mrs. Marsham.

"All the same; we do not like Mr. Bott,—do we, Alice? He is Doctor Fell to us; only I think we could tell why."

"I certainly do not like him," said Alice.

"It can be but of small matter to you, Miss Vavasor," said Mrs. Marsham, "as you will not probably have to see much of him."

"Of the very smallest moment," said Alice. "He did annoy me once, but will never, I dare say, have an opportunity of doing so again."

"I don't know what the annoyance may have been."

"Of course you don't, Mrs. Marsham."

"But I should n't have thought it likely that a person so fully employed as Mr. Bott, and employed, too, on matters of such vast importance, would have gone out of his way to annoy a young lady whom he chanced to meet for a day or two in a country house."

"I don't think that Alice means that he attempted to flirt with her," said Lady Glencora, laughing. "Fancy Mr. Bott's flirtation!"

"Perhaps he did not attempt," said Mrs. Marsham; and the words, the tone, and the innuendo together, were more than Alice was able to bear with equanimity.

"Glencora," said she, rising from her chair, "I think

I 'll leave you alone with Mrs. Marsham. I 'm not disposed to discuss Mr. Bott's character, and certainly not to hear his name mentioned in disagreeable connection with my own."

But Lady Glencora would not let her go. "Nonsense, Alice," she said. "If you and I can't fight our little battles against Mr. Bott and Mrs. Marsham without running away, it is odd. There is a warfare in which they who run away never live to fight another day."

"I hope, Glencora, you do not count me as your enemy?" said Mrs. Marsham, drawing herself up.

"But I shall,—certainly, if you attack Alice. Love me, love my dog. I beg your pardon, Alice; but what I meant was this, Mrs. Marsham: Love me, love the best friend I have in the world."

"I did not mean to offend Miss Vavasor," said Mrs. Marsham, looking at her very grimly. Alice merely bowed her head. She had been offended, and she would not deny it. After that, Mrs. Marsham took herself off, saying that she would be back to dinner. She was angry, but not unhappy. She thought that she could put down Miss Vavasor, and she was prepared to bear a good deal from Lady Glencora—for Mr. Palliser's sake, as she said to herself, with some attempt at a sentimental remembrance of her old friend.

"She 's a nasty old cat," said Lady Glencora, as soon as the door was closed; and she said these words with so droll a voice, with such a childlike shaking of her head, with so much comedy in her grimace, that Alice could not but laugh. "She is," said Lady Glencora. "I know her, and you 'll have to know her, too, be-

fore you 've done with her. It won't at all do for you to run away when she spits at you. You must hold your ground, and show your claws,—and make her know that if she spits you can scratch."

"But I don't want to be a cat myself."

"She 'll find I 'm of the genus, but of the tiger kind, if she persecutes me. Alice, there 's one thing I have made up my mind about. I will not be persecuted. If my husband tells me to do anything, as long as he is my husband, I 'll do it; but I won't be persecuted."

"You should remember that she was a very old friend of Mr. Palliser's mother."

"I do remember; and that may be a very good reason why she should come here occasionally, or go to Matching, or to any place in which we may be living. It 's a bore, of course; but it 's a natural bore, and one that ought to be borne."

"And that will be the beginning and the end of it."

"I 'm afraid not, my dear. It may perhaps be the end of it, but I fear it won't be the beginning. I won't be persecuted. If she gives me advice, I shall tell her to her face that it 's not wanted; and if she insults any friend of mine, as she did you, I shall tell her that she had better stay away. She 'll go and tell him, of course; but I can't help that. I 've made up my mind that I won't be persecuted."

After that, Lady Glencora felt no further inclination to show Burgo's letter to Alice on that occasion. They sat over the drawing-room fire, talking chiefly of Alice's affairs, till it was time for them to dress. But Alice, though she spoke much of Mr. Grey, said no word as to her engagement with George Vavasor. How could she speak of it, inasmuch as she had already resolved,

—already almost resolved,—that that engagement also should be broken?

Alice, when she came down to the drawing-room, before dinner, found Mr. Bott there alone. She had dressed more quickly than her friend, and Mr. Palliser had not yet made his appearance.

"I did not expect the pleasure of meeting Miss Vavasor to-day," he said, as he came up, offering his hand. She gave him her hand, and then sat down, merely muttering some word of reply.

"We spent a very pleasant month down at Matching together;—did n't you think so?"

"I spent a pleasant month there, certainly."

"You left, if I remember, the morning after that late walk out among the ruins? That was unfortunate, was it not? Poor Lady Glencora! it made her very ill; so much so that she could not go to Monkshade, as she particularly wished. It was very sad. Lady Glencora is very delicate,—very delicate, indeed. We, who have the privilege of being near her, ought always to remember that."

"I don't think she is at all delicate."

"Oh! don't you? I 'm afraid that 's your mistake, Miss Vavasor."

"I believe she has very good health, which is the greatest blessing in the world. By delicate I suppose you mean weak and infirm."

"Oh dear, no,—not in the least,—not infirm, certainly! I should be very sorry to be supposed to have said that Lady Glencora is infirm. What I mean is, not robust, Miss Vavasor. Her general organisation, if you understand me, is exquisitely delicate. One can see that, I think, in every glance of her eye."

Alice was going to protest that she had never seen it at all, when Mr. Palliser entered the room along with Mrs. Marsham.

The two gentlemen shook hands, and then Mr. Palliser turned to Alice. She perceived at once by his face that she was unwelcome, and wished herself away from his house. It might be all very well for Lady Glencora to fight with Mrs. Marsham,—and with her husband, too, in regard to the Marsham persecution,—but there could be no reason why she should do so. He just touched her hand, barely closing his thumb upon her fingers, and asked her how she was. Then he turned away from her side of the fire, and began talking to Mrs. Marsham on the other. There was that in his face and in his manner which was positively offensive to her. He made no allusion to his former acquaintance with her,—spoke no word about Matching, no word about his wife, as he would naturally have done to his wife's friend. Alice felt the blood mount into her face, and regretted greatly that she had ever come among these people. Had she not long since made up her mind that she would avoid her great relations, and did not all this prove that it would have been well for her to have clung to that resolution? What was Lady Glencora to her that she should submit herself to be treated as though she were a poor companion,—a dependant, who received a salary for her attendance,—an indigent cousin, hanging on to the bounty of her rich connection? Alice was proud to a fault. She had nursed her pride till it was very faulty. All her troubles and sorrows in life had come from an overfed craving for independence. Why, then, should she submit to be treated with open want of

courtesy by any man; but, of all men, why should she submit to it from such a one as Mr. Palliser,—the heir of a ducal house, rolling in wealth, and magnificent with all the magnificence of British pomp and pride? No; she would make Lady Glencora understand that the close intimacies of daily life were not possible to them!

"I declare I 'm very much ashamed," said Lady Glencora, as she entered the room. "I shan't apologise to you, Alice, for it was you who kept me talking; but I do beg Mrs. Marsham's pardon."

Mrs. Marsham was all smiles and forgiveness, and hoped that Lady Glencora would not make a stranger of her. Then dinner was announced, and Alice had to walk downstairs by herself. She did not care a doit for that, but there had been a disagreeable little contest when the moment came. Lady Glencora had wished to give up Mr. Bott to her cousin, but Mr. Bott had stuck manfully to Lady Glencora's side. He hoped to take Lady Glencora down to dinner very often, and was not at all disposed to abate his privilege.

During dinner-time Alice said very little, nor was there given to her opportunity of saying much. She could not but think of the day of her first arrival at Matching Priory, when she had sat between the Duke of St. Bungay and Jeffrey Palliser, and when everybody had been so civil to her! She now occupied one side of the table by herself, away from the fire, where she felt cold and desolate in the gloom of the large half-lighted room. Mr. Palliser occupied himself with Mrs. Marsham, who talked politics to him; and Mr. Bott never lost a moment in his endeavours to say some civil word to Lady Glencora. Lady Glencora gave him no encouragement; but she hardly dared to

snub him openly in her husband's immediate presence. Twenty times during dinner she said some little word to Alice, attempting at first to make the time pleasant, and then, when the matter was too far gone for that, attempting to give some relief. But it was of no avail. There are moments in which conversation seems to be impossible,—in which the very gods interfere to put a seal upon the lips of the unfortunate one. It was such a moment now with Alice. She had never as yet been used to snubbing. Whatever position she had hitherto held, in that she had always stood foremost,—much more so than had been good for her. When she had gone to Matching, she had trembled for her position; but there all had gone well with her; there Lady Glencora's kindness had at first been able to secure for her a reception that had been flattering, and almost better than flattering. Jeffrey Palliser had been her friend, and would, had she so willed it, have been more than her friend. But now she felt that the halls of the Pallisers were too cold for her, and that the sooner she escaped from their gloom and hard discourtesy the better for her.

Mrs. Marsham, when the three ladies had returned to the drawing-room together, was a little triumphant. She felt that she had put Alice down; and with the energetic prudence of a good general who knows that he should follow up a victory, let the cost of doing so be what it may, she determined to keep her down. Alice had resolved that she would come as seldom as might be to Mr. Palliser's house in Park Lane. That resolution on her part was in close accordance with Mrs. Marsham's own views.

"Is Miss Vavasor going to walk home?" she asked.

"Walk home!—all along Oxford Street! Good gracious! no. Why should she walk? The carriage will take her."

"Or a cab," said Alice. "I am quite used to going about London in a cab by myself."

"I don't think they are nice for young ladies after dark," said Mrs. Marsham. "I was going to offer my servant to walk with her. She is an elderly woman, and would not mind it."

"I 'm sure Alice is very much obliged," said Lady Glencora; "but she will have the carriage."

"You are very good-natured," said Mrs. Marsham; "but gentlemen do so dislike having their horses out at night."

"No gentleman's horses will be out," said Lady Glencora savagely; "and as for mine, it 's what they are there for." It was not often that Lady Glencora made any allusion to her own property, or allowed any one near her to suppose that she remembered the fact that her husband's great wealth was, in truth, her wealth. As to many matters her mind was wrong. In some things her taste was not delicate as should be that of a woman. But, as regarded her money, no woman could have behaved with greater reticence, or a purer delicacy. But now, when she was twitted by her husband's special friend with ill-usage to her husband's horses, because she chose to send her own friend home in her own carriage, she did find it hard to bear.

"I dare say it 's all right," said Mrs. Marsham.

"It is all right," said Lady Glencora. "Mr. Palliser has given me my horses for my own use, to do as I like with them; and if he thinks I take them out when they ought to be left at home, he can tell me so.

Nobody else has a right to do it." Lady Glencora, by this time, was almost in a passion, and showed that she was so.

"My dear Lady Glencora, you have mistaken me," said Mrs. Marsham; "I did not mean anything of that kind."

"I am so sorry," said Alice. "And it is such a pity, as I am quite used to going about in cabs."

"Of course you are," said Lady Glencora. "Why should n't you? I 'd go home in a wheelbarrow if I could n't walk, and had no other conveyance. That 's not the question. Mrs. Marsham understands that."

"Upon my word, I don't understand anything," said that lady.

"I understand this," said Lady Glencora; "that in all such matters as that, I intend to follow my own pleasure. Come, Alice, let us have some coffee," and she rang the bell. "What a fuss we have made abou a stupid old carriage!"

The gentlemen did not return to the drawing-room that evening, having, no doubt, joint work to do in arranging the great financial calculations of the nation; and, at an early hour, Alice was taken home in Lady Glencora's brougham, leaving her cousin still in the hands of Mrs. Marsham.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ELECTION FOR THE CHELSEA DISTRICTS.

March came, and still the Chancellor of the Exchequer held his position. In the early days of March there was given in the House a certain parliamentary explanation on the subject, which, however, did not explain very much to any person. A statement was made which was declared by the persons making it to be altogether satisfactory, but nobody else seemed to find any satisfaction in it. The big-wigs of the Cabinet had made an arrangement which, from the language used by them on this occasion, they must be supposed to have regarded as hardly less permanent than the stars; but everybody else protested that the Government was going to pieces; and Mr. Bott was heard to declare in clubs and lobbies, and wherever he could get a semi-public, political hearing, that this kind of thing would n't do. Lord Brock must either blow hot or cold. If he chose to lean upon Mr. Palliser, he might lean upon him, and Mr. Palliser would not be found wanting. In such case no opposition could touch Lord Brock or the Government. That was Mr. Bott's opinion. But if Lord Brock did not so choose, why, in that case, he must expect that Mr. Palliser, and Mr. Palliser's friends, would—— Mr. Bott did not say what they would do; but he was supposed by those who understood the matter to hint at an Oppo-

sition lobby, and adverse divisions, and to threaten Lord Brock with the open enmity of Mr. Palliser,—and of Mr. Palliser's great follower.

"This kind of thing won't do long, you know," repeated Mr. Bott for the second or third time, as he stood upon the rug before the fire at his club, with one or two of his young friends round him.

"I suppose not," said Calder Jones, the hunting member of Parliament whom we once met at Roebury. "Planty Pall won't stand it, I should say."

"What can he do?" asked another, an unfledged member who was not as yet quite settled as to the leadership under which he intended to work.

"What can he do?" said Mr. Bott, who on such an occasion as this could be very great,—who, for a moment, could almost feel that he might become a leader of a party for himself, and some day institute a Bott ministry. "What can he do? You will very shortly see what he can do. He can make himself the master of the occasion. If Lord Brock does n't look about him, he 'll find that Mr. Palliser will be in the Cabinet without his help."

"You don't mean to say that the Queen will send for Planty Pall!" said the young member.

"I mean to say that the Queen will send for any one that the House of Commons may direct her to call upon," said Mr. Bott, who conceived himself to have gauged the very depths of our glorious Constitution. "How hard it is to make any one understand that the Queen has really nothing to do with it!"

"Come, Bott, draw it mild," said Calder Jones, whose loyalty was shocked by the utter Manchesterialism of his political friend.

"Not if I know it," said Mr. Bott, with something of grandeur in his tone and countenance. "I never drew it mild yet, and I shan't begin now. All our political offences against civilisation have come from men drawing it mild, as you call it. Why is it that Englishmen can't read and write as Americans do? Why can't they vote as they do even in Imperial France? Why are they serfs, less free than those whose chains were broken the other day in Russia? Why is the Spaniard more happy, and the Italian more contented? Because men in power have been drawing it mild!" And Mr. Bott made an action with his hand as though he were drawing up beer from a patent tap.

"But you can't set aside Her Majesty like that, you know," said the young member, who had been presented, and whose mother's old-world notions about the throne still clung to him.

"I should be very sorry," said Mr. Bott; "I 'm no republican." With all his constitutional love, Mr. Bott did not know what the word republican meant. "I mean no disrespect to the throne. The throne in its place is very well. But the power of governing this great nation does not rest with the throne. It is contained within the four walls of the House of Commons. That is the great truth which all young members should learn, and take to their hearts."

"And you think Planty Pall will become Prime Minister?" said Calder Jones.

"I have n't said that; but there are more unlikely things. Among young men I know no man more likely. But I certainly think this,—that if Lord Brock does n't take him into the Cabinet, Lord Brock won't long remain there himself."

In the meantime the election came on in the Chelsea districts, and the whole of the south-western part of the metropolis was covered with posters bearing George Vavasor's name. "Vote for Vavasor and the River Bank." That was the cry with which he went to the electors; and though it must be presumed that it was understood by some portion of the Chelsea electors, it was perfectly unintelligible to the majority of those who read it. His special acquaintances and his general enemies called him Viscount Riverbank, and he was pestered on all sides by questions as to Father Thames. It was Mr. Scruby who invented the legend, and who gave George Vavasor an infinity of trouble by the invention. There was a question in those days as to embanking the river from the Houses of Parliament up to the remote desolations of further Pimlico, and Mr. Scruby recommended the coming member to pledge himself that he would have the work carried on even to Battersea Bridge. "You must have a subject," pleaded Mr. Scruby. "No young member can do anything without a subject. And it should be local; —that is to say, if you have anything of a constituency. Such a subject as that, if it 's well worked, may save you thousands of pounds—thousands of pounds at future elections."

"It won't save me anything at this one, I take it."

"But it may secure the seat, Mr. Vavasor, and afterwards make you the most popular metropolitan member in the House; that is, with your own constituency. Only look at the money that would be spent in the districts if that were done! It would come to millions, sir!"

"But it never will be done."

"What matters that?" and Mr. Scruby almost became eloquent as he explained the nature of a good parliamentary subject. "You should work it up, so as to be able to discuss it at all points. Get the figures by heart, and then, as nobody else will do so, nobody can put you down. Of course it won't be done. If it were done, that would be an end of it, and your bread would be taken out of your mouth. But you can always promise it at the hustings, and can always demand it in the House. I 've known men who 've walked into as much as two thousand a year, permanent place, on the strength of a worse subject than that!"

Vavasor allowed Mr. Scruby to manage the matter for him, and took up the subject of the River Bank. Vavasor and the River Bank was carried about by an army of men with iron shoulder-straps, and huge pasteboard placards six feet high on the top of them. You would think, as you saw the long rows, that the men were being marshalled to their several routes; but they always kept together—four-and-twenty at the heels of each other. "One placard at a time would strike the eye," said Mr. Vavasor, counting the expense up to himself. "There 's no doubt of it," said Mr. Scruby in reply. "One placard will do that, if it 's big enough; but it takes four-and-twenty to touch the imagination." And then sides of houses were covered with that shibboleth—"Vavasor and the River Bank"—the same words repeated in columns down the whole sides of houses. Vavasor himself declared that he was ashamed to walk among his future constituents, so conspicuous had his name become. Grimes saw it, and was dismayed. At first, Grimes ridiculed the cry

with all his publican's wit. "Unless he mean to drown hisself in the Reach, it 's hard to say what he do mean by all that gammon about the River Bank," said Grimes, as he canvassed for the other liberal candidate. But, after a while, Grimes was driven to confess that Mr. Scruby knew what he was about. "He is a sharp 'un, that he is," said Grimes in the inside bar of the Handsome Man; and he almost regretted that he had left the leadership of Mr. Scruby, although he knew that on this occasion he would not have gotten his odd money.

George Vavasor, with much labour, actually did get up the subject of the River Bank. He got himself introduced to men belonging to the Metropolitan Board, and went manfully into the matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. He was able even to work himself into an apparent heat when he was told that the thing was out of the question; and soon found that he had disciples who really believed in him. If he could have brought himself to believe in the thing,—if he could have been induced himself to care whether Chelsea was to be embanked or no, the work would not have been so difficult to him. In that case it would have done good to him, if to no one else. But such belief was beyond him. He had gone too far in life to be capable of believing in, or of caring for, such things. He was ambitious of having a hand in the government of his country, but he was not capable of caring even for that.

But he worked. He worked hard, and spoke vehemently, and promised the men of Chelsea, Pimlico, and Brompton that the path of London westwards had hardly commenced as yet. Sloane Street should be the

new Cheapside. Squares should arise around the Chelsea barracks, with sides open to the water, for which Belgravia would be deserted. There should be palaces there for the rich, because the rich spend their riches; but no rich man's palace should interfere with the poor man's right to the River Bank. Three millions and a half should be spent on the noble street to be constructed, the grandest pathway that the world should ever yet have seen; three millions and a half to be drawn from,—to be drawn from anywhere except from Chelsea;—from the bloated money-bags of the City Corporation, Vavasor once ventured to declare, amidst the encouraging shouts of the men of Chelsea. Mr. Scruby was forced to own that his pupil worked the subject well. "Upon my word, that was uncommon good," he said, almost patting Vavasor on the back, after a speech in which he had vehemently asserted that his ambition to represent the Chelsea districts had all come of his long-fixed idea that the glory of future London would be brought about by the embankment of the river at Chelsea.

But armies of men carrying big boards, and public-houses open at every corner, and placards in which the letters are three feet long, cost money. Those few modest hundreds which Mr. Scruby had already received before the work began, had been paid on the supposition that the election would not take place till September. Mr. Scruby made an early request, a very early request, that a further sum of fifteen hundred pounds should be placed in his hands; and he did this in a tone which clearly signified that not a man would be sent about through the streets, or a poster put upon a wall, till this request had been conceded. Mr.

Scruby was in possession of two very distinct manners of address. In his jovial moods, when he was instigating his clients to fight their battles well, it might almost be thought that he was doing it really for the love of the thing; and some clients, so thinking, had believed for a few hours that Scruby, in his jolly, passionate eagerness, would pour out his own money like dust, trusting implicitly to future days for its return. But such clients had soon encountered Mr. Scruby's other manner, and had perceived that they were mistaken.

The thing had come so suddenly upon George Vavasor that there was not time for him to carry on his further operations through his sister. Had he written to Kate,—let him have written in what language he would,—she would have first rejoined by a negative, and there would have been a correspondence before he had induced her to comply. He thought of sending for her by telegram, but even in that there would have been too much delay. He resolved, therefore, to make his application to Alice himself, and he wrote to her, explaining his condition. The election had come upon him quite suddenly, as she knew, he said. He wanted two thousand pounds instantly, and felt little scruple in asking her for it, as he was aware that the old squire would be only too glad to saddle the property with a legacy to Alice for the repayment of this money, though he would not have advanced a shilling himself for the purpose of the election. Then he said a word or two as to his prolonged absence from Queen Anne Street. He had not been there because he had felt, from her manner when they last met, that she would for a while prefer to be left free from the un-

avoidable excitement of such interviews. But should he be triumphant in his present contest, he should go to her to share his triumph with her; or, should he fail, he should go to her to console him in his failure.

Within three days he heard from her, saying that the money would be at once placed to his credit. She sent him also her candid good wishes for success in his enterprise, but beyond this her letter said nothing. There was no word of love,—no word of welcome,—no expression of a desire to see him. Vavasor, as he perceived all this in the reading of her note, felt a triumph in the possession of her money. She was ill-using him by her coldness, and there was comfort in revenge. "It serves her right," he said to himself. "She should have married me at once when she said she would do so, and then it would have been my own."

When Mr. Tombe had communicated with John Grey on the matter of this increased demand,—this demand which Mr. Tombe began to regard as carrying a love affair rather too far,—Grey had telegraphed back that Vavasor's demand for money, if made through Mr. John Vavasor, was to be honoured to the extent of five thousand pounds. Mr. Tombe raised his eyebrows, and reflected that some men were very foolish. But John Grey's money matters were of such a nature as to make Mr. Tombe know that he must do as he was bidden; and the money was paid to George Vavasor's account.

He told Kate nothing of this. Why should he trouble himself to do so? Indeed, at this time he wrote no letters to his sister, though she twice sent to him, knowing what his exigencies would be, and made further tenders of her own money. He could not re-

ply to these offers without telling her that money had been forthcoming from that other quarter, and so he left them unanswered.

In the meantime the battle went on gloriously. Mr. Travers, the other liberal candidate, spent his money freely,—or else some other person did so on his behalf. When Mr. Scruby mentioned this last alternative to George Vavasor, George cursed his own luck in that he had never found such backers. "I don't call a man half a member when he 's brought in like that," said Mr. Scruby, comforting him. "He can't do what he likes with his vote. He ain't independent. You never hear of those fellows getting anything good. Pay for the article yourself, Mr. Vavasor, and then it 's your own. That 's what I always say."

Mr. Grimes went to work strenuously, almost fiercely, in the opposite interest, telling all that he knew, and perhaps more than he knew, of Vavasor's circumstances. He was at work morning, noon, and night, not only in his own neighbourhood, but among those men on the river bank of whom he had spoken so much in his interview with Vavasor in Cecil Street. The entire Vavasorian army with its placards was entirely upset on more than one occasion, and was once absolutely driven ignominiously into the river mud. And all this was done under the direction of Mr. Grimes. Vavasor himself was pelted with offal from the sinking tide, so that the very name of the River Bank became odious to him. He was a man who did not like to have his person touched, and when they hustled him he became angry. "Lord love you, Mr. Vavasor," said Scruby, "that 's nothing! I 've had a candidate so mauled,—it was in the Hamlets, I think,—that there was n't a

spot on him that was n't painted with rotten eggs. The smell was something quite awful. But I brought him in through it all."

And Mr. Scruby at last did as much for George Vavasor as he had done for the hero of the Hamlets. At the close of the poll Vavasor's name stood at the head by a considerable majority, and Scruby comforted him by saying that Travers certainly would n't stand the expense of a petition, as the seat was to be held only for a few months.

"And you 've done it very cheap, Mr. Vavasor," said Scruby, "considering that the seat is metropolitan. I do say that you have done it cheap. Another thousand, or twelve hundred, will cover everything—say thirteen, perhaps, at the outside. And when you shall have fought the battle once again, you 'll have paid your footing, and the fellows will let you in almost for nothing after that."

A further sum of thirteen hundred pounds was wanted at once, and then the whole thing was to be repeated over again in six months' time ! This was not consolatory. But, nevertheless, there was a triumph in the thing itself which George Vavasor was man enough to enjoy. It would be something to have sat in the House of Commons, though it should only have been for half a session.

CHAPTER XIX.

GEORGE VAVASOR TAKES HIS SEAT.

GEORGE VAVASOR'S feeling of triumph was not unjustifiable. It is something to have sat in the House of Commons, though it has been but for one session! There is on the left-hand side of our great national hall,—on the left-hand side as one enters it, and opposite to the doors leading to the Law Courts,—a pair of gilded lamps, with a door between them, near to which a privileged old dame sells her apples and her oranges, solely, as I presume, for the accommodation of the members of the House and of the great policeman who guards the pass. Between those lamps is the entrance to the House of Commons, and none but members may go that way! It is the only gate before which I have ever stood filled with envy,—sorrowing to think that my steps might never pass under it. There are many portals forbidden to me, as there are many forbidden to all men; and forbidden fruit, they say, is sweet; but my lips have watered after no other fruit but that which grows so high, within the sweep of that great policeman's truncheon.

Ah, my male friend and reader, who earnest thy bread, perhaps, as a country vicar; or sittest, maybe, at some weary desk in Somerset House; or who, perhaps, rulest the yard behind the Cheapside counter, hast thou never stood there and longed?—hast thou

never confessed, when standing there, that Fate has been unkind to thee in denying thee the one thing that thou hast wanted? I have done so; and as my slow steps have led me up that more than royal staircase, to those passages and halls which require the hallowing breath of centuries to give them the glory in British eyes which they shall one day possess, I have told myself, in anger and in grief, that to die and not to have won that right of way, though but for a session,—not to have passed by the narrow entrance through those lamps,—is to die and not to have done that which it becomes an Englishman to have achieved.

There are, doubtless, some who come out by that road, the loss of whose society is not to be regretted. England does not choose her six hundred and fifty-four best men. One comforts one's self, sometimes, with remembering that. The George Vavasors, the Calder Joneses, and the Botts are admitted. Dishonesty, ignorance, and vulgarity do not close the gate of that heaven against aspirants; and it is a consolation to the ambition of the poor to know that the ambition of the rich can attain that glory by the strength of its riches alone. But though England does not send thither none but her best men, the best of her Commoners do find their way there. It is the highest and most legitimate pride of an Englishman to have the letters M.P. written after his name. No selection from the alphabet, no doctorship, no fellowship, be it of ever so learned or royal a society, no knightship,—not though it be of the Garter,—confers so fair an honour. Mr. Bott was right when he declared that this country is governed from between the walls of that House, though the truth was almost defiled by the lips which

uttered it. He might have added that from thence flow the waters of the world's progress,—that fullest fountain of advancing civilisation.

George Vavasor, as he went in by the lamps and the apple-stall, under the guardianship of Mr. Bott, felt all the pride of which I have been speaking. He was a man quite capable of feeling such pride as it should be felt,—capable, in certain dreamy moments, of looking at the thing with pure and almost noble eyes; of understanding the ambition of serving with truth so great a nation as that which fate had made his own. Nature, I think, had so fashioned George Vavasor, that he might have been a good, and perhaps a great man; whereas Mr. Bott had been born small. Vavasor had educated himself to badness with his eyes open. He had known what was wrong, and had done it, having taught himself to think that bad things were best. But poor Mr. Bott had meant to do well, and thought that he had done very well indeed. He was a tuft-hunter and a toady, but he did not know that he was doing amiss in seeking to rise by tuft-hunting and toadying. He was both mean and vain, both a bully and a coward, and in politics, I fear, quite unscrupulous in spite of his grand dogmas; but he believed that he was progressing in public life by the proper and usual means, and was troubled by no idea that he did wrong.

Vavasor, in those dreamy moments of which I have spoken, would sometimes feel tempted to cut his throat and put an end to himself, because he knew that he had taught himself amiss. Again he would sadly ask himself whether it was yet too late; always, however, answering himself that it was too late. Even now, at

this moment, as he went in between the lamps, and felt much of the honest pride of which I have spoken, he told himself that it was too late. What could he do now, hampered by such a debt as that which he owed to his cousin, and with the knowledge that it must be almost indefinitely increased, unless he meant to give up this seat in Parliament, which had cost him so dearly, almost before he had begun to enjoy it? But his courage was good, and he was able to resolve that he would go on with the business that he had in hand, and play out his game to the end. He had achieved his seat in the House of Commons, and was so far successful. Men who had ever been gracious to him were now more gracious than ever, and they who had not hitherto treated him with courtesy, now began to smile and to be very civil. It was, no doubt, a great thing to have the privilege of that entrance between the lamps.

Mr. Bott had the new member now in hand, not because there had been any old friendship between them, but Mr. Bott was on the look-out for followers, and Vavasor was on the look-out for a party. A man gets no great thanks for attaching himself to existing power. Our friend might have enrolled himself among the general supporters of the Government without attracting much attention. He would in such case have been at the bottom of a long list. But Mr. Palliser was a rising man, round whom, almost without wish of his own, a party was forming itself. If he came into power,—as come he must, according to Mr. Bott and many others,—then they who had acknowledged the new light before its brightness had been declared, might expect their reward.

Vavasor, as he passed through the lobby to the door of the House, leaning on Mr. Bott's arm, was very silent. He had spoken but little since they had left their cab in Palace Yard, and was not very well pleased by the garrulity of his companion. He was going to sit among the first men of his nation, and to take his chance of making himself one of them. He believed in his own ability; he believed thoroughly in his own courage; but he did not believe in his own conduct. He feared that he had done,—feared still more strongly that he would be driven to do,—that which would shut men's ears against his words, and would banish him from high places. No man believes in himself who knows himself to be a rascal; however great may be his talent, or however high his pluck.

"Of course you have heard a debate?" said Mr. Bott.

"Yes," answered Vavasor, who wished to remain silent.

"Many, probably?"

"No."

"But you have heard debates from the gallery. Now you 'll hear them from the body of the House, and you 'll find how very different it is. There 's no man can know what Parliament is who has never had a seat. Indeed, no one can thoroughly understand the British Constitution without it. I felt, very early in life, that that should be my line; and though it 's hard work and no pay, I mean to stick to it. How do, Thompson? You know Vavasor? He 's just returned from the Chelsea districts, and I 'm taking him up. We shan't divide to-night; shall we? Look! there 's Farringcourt just coming out; he 's listened to better

than any man in the House now, but he 'll borrow half-a-crown from you if you 'll lend him one. How d'ye do, my lord? I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you well?" and Bott bowed low to a lord who was hurrying through the lobby as fast as his shuffling feet would carry him. "Of course you know him?"

Vavasor, however, did not know the lord in question, and was obliged to say so.

"I thought you were up to all these things?" said Bott.

"Taking the peerage generally, I am not up to it," said Vavasor, with a curl on his lip.

"But you ought to have known him. That was Viscount Middlesex; he has got something on to-night about the Irish Church. His father is past ninety, and he 's over sixty. We 'll go in now; but let me give you one bit of advice, my dear fellow—don't think of speaking this session. A member can do no good at that work till he has learned something of the forms of the House. The forms of the House are everything; upon my word they are. This is Mr. Vavasor, the new member for the Chelsea districts."

Our friend was thus introduced to the doorkeeper, who smiled familiarly, and seemed to wink his eye. Then George Vavasor passed through into the House itself, under the wing of Mr. Bott.

Vavasor, as he walked up the House to the clerk's table and took the oath and then walked down again, felt himself to be almost taken aback by the little notice which was accorded to him. It was not that he had expected to create a sensation, or that he had for a moment thought on the subject, but the thing which he was doing was so great to him, that the total indif-

ference of those around him was a surprise to him. After he had taken his seat, a few men came up by degrees and shook hands with him; but it seemed, as they did so, merely because they were passing that way. He was anxious not to sit next to Mr. Bott, but he found himself unable to avoid this contiguity. That gentleman stuck to him pertinaciously, giving him directions which, at the spur of the moment, he hardly knew how not to obey. So he found himself sitting behind Mr. Palliser, a little to the right, while Mr. Bott occupied the ear of the rising man.

There was a debate in progress, but it seemed to Vavasor, as soon as he was able to become critical, to be but a dull affair, and yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer was on his legs, and Mr. Palliser was watching him as a cat watches a mouse. The speaker was full of figures, as becomes a Chancellor of the Exchequer; and as every new budget of them fell from him, Mr. Bott, with audible whispers, poured into the ear of his chief certain calculations of his own, most of which went to prove that the financier in office was altogether wrong. Vavasor thought that he could see that Mr. Palliser was receiving more of this assistance than was palatable to him. He would listen, if he did listen, without making any sign that he heard, and would occasionally shake his head with symptoms of impatience. But Mr. Bott was a man not to be repressed by a trifle. When Mr. Palliser shook his head he became more assiduous than ever, and when Mr. Palliser slightly moved himself to the left, he boldly followed him.

No general debate arose on the subject which the Minister had in hand, and when he sat down, Mr.

Palliser would not get up, though Mr. Bott counselled him to do so. The matter was over for the night, and the time had arrived for Lord Middlesex. That nobleman got upon his feet, with a roll of papers in his hand, and was proceeding to address the House on certain matters of church reform, with great energy; but, alas, for him and for his feelings! before his energy had got itself into full swing, the members were swarming away through the doors like a flock of sheep. Mr. Palliser got up and went, and was followed at once by Mr. Bott, who succeeded in getting hold of his arm in the lobby. Had not Mr. Palliser been an even-tempered, calculating man, with a mind and spirit well under his command, he must have learned to hate Mr. Bott before this time. Away streamed the members, but still the noble lord went on speaking, struggling hard to keep up his fire as though no such exodus were in process. There was but little to console him. He knew that the papers would not report one sentence in twenty of those he uttered. He knew that no one would listen to him willingly. He knew that he had worked for weeks and months to get up his facts, and he was beginning to know that he had worked in vain. As he summoned courage to look round, he began to fear that some enemy would count the House, and that all would be over. He had given heart and soul to this affair. His cry was not as Vavasor's cry about the River Bank. He believed in his own subject with a great faith, thinking that he could make men happier and better, and bring them nearer to their God. I said that he had worked for weeks and months. I might have said that he had been all his life at this work. Though he shuffled with his feet

when he walked, and knocked his words together when he talked, he was an earnest man, meaning to do well, seeking no other reward for his work than the appreciation of those whom he desired to serve. But this was never to be his. For him there was in store nothing but disappointment. And yet he will work on to the end, either in this House or in the other, labouring wearily, without visible wages of any kind, and, one may say, very sadly. But when he has been taken to his long rest, men will acknowledge that he has done something, and there will be left on the minds of those who shall remember him a conviction that he served a good cause diligently, and not altogether inefficiently. Invisible are his wages, yet in some coin are they paid. Invisible is the thing he does, and yet it is done. Let us hope that some sense of this tardy appreciation may soothe his spirit beyond the grave. On the present occasion there was nothing to soothe his spirit. The Speaker sat, urbane and courteous, with his eyes turned towards the unfortunate orator; but no other ears in the House seemed to listen to him. The corps of reporters had dwindled down to two, and they used their pens very listlessly, taking down here a sentence and there a sentence, knowing that their work was naught. Vavasor sat it out to the last, as it taught him a lesson in those forms of the House which Mr. Bott had truly told him it would be well that he should learn. And at last he did learn the form of a "count-out." Some one from a back seat muttered something, which the Speaker understood; and that high officer, having had his attention called to a fact of which he would never have taken cognisance without such calling, did count the House,

and finding that it contained but twenty-three members, he put an end to his own labours and to those of poor Lord Middlesex. With what feelings that noble lord must have taken himself home, and sat himself down in his study, vainly opening a book before his eyes, can we not all imagine? A man he was with ample means, with children who would do honour to his name; one whose wife believed in him, if no one else would do so; a man, let us say, with a clear conscience, to whom all good things had been given. But of whom now was he thinking of envy? Early on that same day Farringcourt had spoken in the House, —a man to whom no one would lend a shilling, whom the privilege of that House kept out of gaol, whose word no man believed; who was wifeless, childless, and unloved. But three hundred men had hung listening upon his words. When he laughed in his speech, they laughed; when he was indignant against the Minister, they sat breathless, as the Spaniard sits in the critical moment of the bull-killing. Whichever way he turned himself, he carried them with him. Crowds of members flocked into the House from libraries and smoking-rooms when it was known that this ne'er-do-well was on his legs. The Strangers' Gallery was filled to overflowing. The reporters turned their rapid pages, working their fingers wearily till the sweat drops stood upon their brows. And as the Premier was attacked with some special impetus of redoubled irony, men declared that he would be driven to enrol the speaker among his colleagues, in spite of dishonoured bills and evil reports. A man who could shake the thunderbolts like that must be paid to shake them on the right side. It was of this man, and of

his success, that Lord Middlesex was envious, as he sat, wretched and respectable, in his solitary study!

Mr. Bott had left the House with Mr. Palliser; and Vavasor, after the count-out, was able to walk home by himself, and think of the position which he had achieved. He told himself over and over again that he had done a great thing in obtaining that which he now possessed, and he endeavoured to teach himself that the price he was paying for it was not too dear. But already there had come upon him something of that feeling,—that terribly human feeling,—which deprives every prize that is gained of half its value. The mere having it robs the diamond of its purity, and mixes vile alloy with the gold. Lord Middlesex, as he had floundered on into terrible disaster, had not been a subject to envy. There had been nothing of brilliance in the debate, and the members had loomed no larger than ordinary men at ordinary clubs. The very door-keepers had hardly treated them with respect. The great men with whose names the papers are filled had sat silent, gloomy, and apparently idle. As soon as a fair opportunity was given them they escaped out of the House, as boys might escape from school. Everybody had rejoiced in the break-up of the evening, except that one poor old lord who had worked so hard. Vavasor had spent everything that he had to become a member of that House, and now, as he went alone to his lodgings, he could not but ask himself whether the thing purchased was worth the purchase-money.

But his courage was still high. Though he was gloomy, and almost sad, he knew that he could trust himself to fight out the battle to the last. On the morrow he would go to Queen Anne Street, and would

demand sympathy there from her who had professed to sympathise with him so strongly in his political desires. With her, at any rate, the glory of his membership would not be dimmed by any untoward knowledge of the realities. She had only seen the play acted from the boxes; and to her eyes the dresses would still be of silk velvet, and the swords of bright steel.

CHAPTER XX.

A LOVE GIFT.

When Alice heard of her cousin's success, and understood that he was actually member of Parliament for the Chelsea districts, she resolved that she would be triumphant. She had sacrificed nearly everything to her desire for his success in public life, and now that he had achieved the first great step towards that success, it would have been madness on her part to decline her share in the ovation. If she could not rejoice in that, what source of joy would then be left for her? She had promised to be his wife, and at present she was under the bonds of that promise. She had so promised because she had desired to identify her interests with his,—because she wished to share his risks, to assist his struggles, and to aid him in his public career. She had done all this, and he had been successful. She strove, therefore, to be triumphant on his behalf, but she knew that she was striving ineffectually. She had made a mistake, and the days were coming in which she would have to own to herself that she had done so in sackcloth, and to repent with ashes.

But yet she struggled to be triumphant. The tidings were first brought to her by her servant, and then she at once sat down to write him a word or two of congratulation. But she found the task more difficult than she had expected, and she gave it up. She had written

no word to him since the day on which he had left her almost in anger, and now she did not know how she was to address him. "I will wait till he comes," she said, putting way from her the paper and pens. "It will be easier to speak than to write." But she wrote to Kate, and contrived to put some note of triumph into her letter. Kate had written to her at length, filling her sheet with a loud pæan of sincere rejoicing. To Kate, down in Westmoreland, it had seemed that her brother had already done everything. He had already tied Fortune to his chariot wheels. He had made the great leap, and had overcome the only obstacle that Fate had placed in his way. In her great joy she almost forgot whence had come the money with which the contest had been won. She was not enthusiastic in many things;—about herself she was never so; but now she was elated with an enthusiasm which seemed to know no bounds. "I am proud," she said, in her letter to Alice. "No other thing that he could have done would have made me so proud of him. Had the Queen sent for him and made him an earl, it would have been as nothing to this. When I think that he has forced his way into Parliament without any great friend, with nothing to back him but his own wit"—she had, in truth, forgotten Alice's money as she wrote,—"that he has achieved his triumph in the metropolis, among the most wealthy and most fastidious of the richest city in the world, I do feel proud of my brother. And, Alice, I hope that you are proud of your lover." Poor girl! One cannot but like her pride, nay, almost love her for it, though it was so sorely misplaced. It must be remembered that she had known nothing of Messrs. Grimes and Scruby, and

the River Bank, and that the means had been wanting to her of learning the principles upon which some metropolitan elections are conducted.

"And, Alice, I hope that you are proud of your lover!" "He is not my lover," Alice said to herself. "He knows that he is not. He understands it, though she may not." And if not your lover, Alice Vavasor, what is he then to you? And what are you to him, if not his love? She was beginning to understand that she had put herself in the way of utter destruction;—that she had walked to the brink of a precipice, and that she must now topple over it. "He is not my lover," she said; and then she sat silent and moody, and it took her hours to get her answer written to Kate.

On the same afternoon she saw her father for a moment or two. "So George has got himself returned," he said, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, he has been successful. I 'm sure you must be glad, papa."

"Upon my word, I 'm not. He has bought a seat for three months, and with whose money has he purchased it?"

"Don't let us always speak of money, papa."

"When you discuss the value of a thing just purchased, you must mention the price before you know whether the purchaser has done well or badly. They have let him in for his money because there are only a few months left before the general election. Two thousand pounds he has had, I believe?"

"And if as much more is wanted for the next election he shall have it."

"Very well, my dear—very well. If you choose to make a beggar of yourself, I cannot help it. In-

deed, I shall not complain, though he should spend all your money, if you do not marry him at last."

In answer to this, Alice said nothing. On that point her father's wishes were fast growing to be identical with her own.

"I tell you fairly what are my feelings and my wishes," he continued. "Nothing, in my opinion, would be so deplorable and ruinous as such a marriage. You tell me that you have made up your mind to take him, and I know well that nothing that I can say will turn you. But I believe that when he has spent all your money he will not take you, and that thus you will be saved. Thinking as I do about him, you can hardly expect that I should triumph because he has got himself into Parliament with your money!"

Then he left her, and it seemed to Alice that he had been very cruel. There had been little, she thought, —nay, nothing,—of a father's loving tenderness in his words to her. If he had spoken to her differently, might she not even now have confessed everything to him? But herein Alice accused him wrongfully. Tenderness from him on this subject had, we may say, become impossible. She had made it impossible. Nor could he tell her the extent of his wishes without damaging his own cause. He could not let her know that all that was done was so done with the view of driving her into John Grey's arms.

But what words were those for a father to speak to a daughter! Had she brought herself to such a state that her own father desired to see her deserted and thrown aside? And was it probable that this wish of his should come to pass? As to that, Alice had already made up her mind. She thought that she had

made up her mind that she would never become her cousin's wife. It needed not her father's wish to accomplish her salvation, if her salvation lay in being separated from him.

On the next morning George went to her. The reader will, perhaps, remember their last interview. He had come to her after her letter to him from Westmoreland, and had asked her to seal their reconciliation with a kiss; but she had refused him. He had offered to embrace her, and she had shuddered before him, fearing his touch, telling him by signs much more clear than any words, that she felt for him none of the love of a woman. Then he had turned from her in anger, declaring to her honestly that he was angry. Since that he had borrowed her money,—had made two separate assaults upon her purse,—and was now come to tell her of the results. How was he to address her? I beg that it may be also remembered that he was not a man to forget the treatment he had received. When he entered the room, Alice looked at him, at first, almost furtively. She was afraid of him. It must be confessed that she already feared him. Had there been in the man anything of lofty principle he might still have made her his slave, though I doubt whether he could ever again have forced her to love him. She looked at him furtively, and perceived that the gash on his face was nearly closed. The mark of existing anger was not there. He had come to her intending to be gentle, if it might be possible. He had been careful in his dress, as though he wished to try once again if the rôle of lover might be within his reach.

Alice was the first to speak. "George, I am so glad

that you have succeeded! I wish you joy with my whole heart."

"Thanks, dearest. But before I say another word, let me acknowledge my debt. Unless you had aided me with your money, I could not have succeeded."

"Oh, George! pray don't speak of that!"

"Let me rather speak of it at once, and have done. If you will think of it, you will know that I must speak of it sooner or later." He smiled and looked pleasant, as he used to do in those Swiss days.

"Well, then, speak and have done."

"I hope you have trusted me in thus giving me the command of your fortune?"

"Oh yes."

"I do believe that you have. I need hardly say that I could not have stood for the last election without it; and I must try to make you understand that if I had not come forward at this vacancy, I should have stood no chance for the next; otherwise, I should not have been justified in paying so dearly for a seat for one session. You can understand that; eh, Alice?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Anybody, even your father, would tell you that; though, probably, he regards my ambition to be a member of Parliament as a sign of downright madness. But I was obliged to stand now, if I intended to go on with it, as that old lord died so inopportunely. Well, about the money! It is quite upon the cards that I may be forced to ask for another loan when the autumn comes."

"You shall have it, George."

"Thanks, Alice. And now I will tell you what I propose. You know that I have been reconciled,—

with a sort of reconciliation,—to my grandfather? Well, when the next affair is over, I propose to tell him exactly how you and I then stand."

"Do not go into that now, George. It is enough for you at present to be assured that such assistance as I can give you is at your command. I want you to feel the full joy of your success, and you will do so more thoroughly if you will banish all these money troubles from your mind for a while."

"They shall, at any rate, be banished while I am with you," said he. "There; let them go!" And he lifted up his right hand, and blew at the tips of his fingers. "Let them vanish," said he. "It is always well to be rid of such troubles for a time."

It is well to be rid of them at any time, or at all times, if only they can be banished without danger. But when a man has overused his liver till it will not act for him any longer, it is not well for him to resolve that he will forget the weakness of his organ just as he sits down to dinner.

It was a pretty bit of acting, that of Vavasor's, when he blew away his cares; and, upon the whole, I do not know that he could have done better. But Alice saw through it, and he knew that she did so. The whole thing was uncomfortable to him, except the fact that he had the promise of her further moneys. But he did not intend to rest satisfied with this. He must extract from her some meed of approbation, some show of sympathy, some spark of affection, true or pretended, in order that he might at least affect to be satisfied, and be enabled to speak of the future without open embarrassment. How could even he take her money from her, unless he might presume that he stood with

her upon some ground that belonged mutually to them both?

"I have already taken my seat," said he.

"Yes; I saw that in the newspapers. My acquaintance among members of Parliament is very small, but I see that you were introduced, as they call it, by one of the few men that I do know. Is Mr. Bott a friend of yours?"

"No,—certainly not a friend. I may probably have to act with him in public."

"Ah, that 's just what they said of Mr. Palliser when they felt ashamed of his having such a man as his guest. I think if I were in public life I should try to act with people that I could like."

"Then you dislike Mr. Bott?"

"I do not like him, but my feelings about him are not violent."

"He is a vulgar ass," said George, "with no more pretensions to rank himself a gentleman than your footman."

"If I had one."

"But he will get on in Parliament, to a certain extent."

"I 'm afraid I don't quite understand what are the requisites for parliamentary success, or indeed of what it consists. Is his ambition, do you suppose, the same as yours?"

"His ambition, I take it, does not go beyond a desire to be parliamentary flunkey to a big man,—with wages, if possible, but without, if the wages are impossible."

"And yours?"

"Oh, as to mine;—there are some things, Alice, that a man does not tell to any one."

"Are there? They must be very terrible things."

"The schoolboy, when he sits down to make his rhymes, dares not say, even to his sister, that he hopes to rival Milton; but he nurses such a hope. The preacher, when he prepares his sermon, does not whisper, even to his wife, his belief that thousands may perhaps be turned to repentance by the strength of his words; but he thinks that the thousand converts are possible."

"And you, though you will not say so, intend to rival Chatham, and to make your thousand converts in politics."

"I like to hear you laugh at me,—I do, indeed. It does me good to hear your voice again with some touch of satire in it. It brings back the old days,—the days to which I hope we may soon revert without pain. Shall it not be so, dearest?"

Her playful manner at once deserted her. Why had he made this foolish attempt to be tender? "I do not know," she said gloomily.

For a few minutes he sat silent, fingering some article belonging to her which was lying on the table. It was a small steel paper-knife, of which the handle was cast and gilt; a thing of no great value, of which the price may have been five shillings. He sat with it, passing it through his fingers, while she went on with her work.

"Who gave you this paper-cutter?" he said suddenly.

"Goodness me, why do you ask? and especially, why do you ask in that way?"

"I asked simply because if it is a present to you from any one, I will take up something else."

"It was given me by Mr. Grey."

He let it drop from his fingers on to the table with a noise, and then pushed it from him, so that it fell on the other side, near to where she sat.

"George," she said, as she stooped and picked it up, "your violence is unreasonable; pray do not repeat it."

"I did not mean it," he said, "and I beg your pardon. I was simply unfortunate in the article I selected. And who gave you this?" In saying which he took up a little ivory foot-rule that was folded up so as to bring it within the compass of three inches.

"It so happens that no one gave me that; I bought it at a stupid bazaar."

"Then this will do. You shall give it me as a present, on the renewal of our love."

"It is too poor a thing to give," said she, speaking still more gloomily than she had done before.

"By no means; nothing is too poor, if given in that way. Anything will do; a ribbon, a glove, a broken sixpence. Will you give me something that I may take, and, taking it, may know that your heart is given with it?"

"Take the rule, if you please," she said.

"And about the heart?" he asked.

He should have been more of a rascal or less. Seeing how very much of a rascal he was already, I think it would have been better that he should have been more,—that he should have been able to content his spirit with the simple acquisition of her money, and that he should have been free from all those remains of a finer feeling which made him desire her love also. But it was not so. It was necessary for his comfort that she should, at any rate, say she loved him. "Well, Alice, and what about the heart?" he asked again.

"I would so much rather talk about politics, George," said she.

The cicatrice began to make itself very visible in his face, and the debonair manner was fast vanishing. He had fixed his eyes upon her, and had inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Alice, that is not quite fair," he said.

"I do not mean to be unfair."

"I am not so sure of that. I almost think that you do mean it. You have told me that you intend to become my wife. If, after that, you wilfully make me miserable, will not that be unfair?"

"I am not making you miserable,—certainly not wilfully."

"Did that letter which you wrote to me from Westmoreland mean anything?"

"George, do not strive to make me think that it meant too much."

"If it did, you had better say so at once."

But Alice, though she would have said so had she dared, made no answer to this. She sat silent, turning her face away from his gaze, longing that the meeting might be over, and feeling that she had lost her own self-respect.

"Look here, Alice," he said, "I find it very hard to understand you. When I look back over all that has passed between us, and to that other episode in your life, summing it all up with your conduct to me at present, I find myself at a loss to read your character."

"I fear I cannot help you in the reading of it."

"When you first loved me—for you did love me—I understood that well enough. There is no young man who in early life does not read with sufficient clearness

that sweetest morsel of poetry. And when you quarrelled with me, judging somewhat harshly of my offences, I understood that also; for it is the custom of women to be hard in their judgment on such sins. When I heard that you had accepted the offer made to you by that gentleman in Cambridgeshire, I thought that I understood you still,—knowing how natural it was that you should seek some cure for your wound. I understood it, and accused myself, not you, in that I had driven you to so fatal a remedy." Here Alice turned round towards him sharply, as though she were going to interrupt him, but she said nothing, though he paused for her to speak; and then he went on. "And I understood it well when I heard that this cure had been too much for you. By heavens, yes! there was no misunderstanding that. I meant no insult to the man when I upset his little toy just now. I have not a word to say against him. For many women he would make a model husband, but you are not one of them. And when you discovered this yourself, as you did, I understood that without difficulty. Yes, by heavens! if ever woman had been driven to a mistake, you had been driven to one there." Here she looked at him again, and met his eyes. She looked at him with something of his own fierceness in her face, as though she were preparing herself to fight with him; but she said nothing at the moment, and then he again went on. "And, Alice, I understood it also when you again consented to be my wife. I thought that I still understood you then. I may have been vain to think so, but surely it was natural. I believed that the old love had come back upon you, and again warmed your heart. I thought that it had been cold during our

separation, and I was pleased to think so. Was that unnatural? Put yourself in my place, and say if you would not have thought so. I told myself that I understood you then, and I told myself that in all that you had done you had acted as a true, and good, and loving woman. I thought of you much, and I saw that your conduct, as a whole, was intelligible and becoming." The last word grated on Alice's ears, and she showed her anger by the motion of her foot upon the floor. Her cousin noted it all, but went on as though he had not noted it. "But now your present behaviour makes all the rest a riddle. You have said that you would be my wife, declaring thereby that you had forgiven my offences, and, as I suppose, reassuring me of your love; and yet you receive me with all imaginable coldness. What am I to think of it, and in what way would you have me behave to you? When last I was here I asked you for a kiss." As he said this he looked at her with all his eyes, with his mouth just open, so as to show the edges of his white teeth, with the wound down his face all wide and purple. The last word came with a stigmatising hiss from his lips. Though she did not essay to speak, he paused again, as if he were desirous that she might realise the full purport of such a request. I think that, in the energy of his speaking, a touch of true passion had come upon him; that he had forgotten his rascaldom, and his need of her money, and that he was punishing her with the whole power of his vengeance for the treatment which he had received from her. "I asked you for a kiss. If you are to be my wife you can have no shame in granting me such a request. Within the last two months you have told me that you

would marry me. What am I to think of such a promise if you deny me all customary signs of your affection?" Then he paused again, and she found that the time had come in which she must say something to him.

"I wonder you cannot understand," she said, "that I have suffered much."

"And is that to be my answer?"

"I don't know what answer you want."

"Come, Alice, do not be untrue; you do know what answer I want, and you know also whether my wanting it is unreasonable."

"No one ever told me that I was untrue before," she said.

"You do know what it is that I desire. I desire to learn that the woman who is to be my wife, in truth, loves me."

She was standing up, and so was he also, but still she said nothing. He had in his hand the little rule which she had told him that he might take, but he held it as though in doubt what he would do with it. "Well, Alice, am I to hear anything from you?"

"Not now, George; you are angry, and I will not speak to you in your anger."

"Have I not cause to be angry? Do you not know that you are treating me badly?"

"I know that my head aches, and that I am very wretched. I wish you would leave me."

"There, then, is your gift," said he, and he threw the rule over on to the sofa behind her. "And there is the trumpery trinket which I had hoped you would have worn for my sake." Whereupon something which he had taken from his waistcoat-pocket was

thrown violently into the fender, beneath the fire-grate. He then walked with quick steps to the door; but when his hand was on the handle, he turned. "Alice," he said, "when I am gone, try to think honestly of your conduct to me." Then he went, and she remained still, till she heard the front door close behind him.

When she was sure that he was gone, her first movement was made in search of the trinket. I fear that this was not dignified on her part; but I think that it was natural. It was not that she had any desire for the jewel, or any curiosity even to see it. She would very much have preferred that he should have brought nothing of the kind to her. But she had a feminine reluctance that anything of value should be destroyed without a purpose. So she took the shovel, and poked among the ashes, and found the ring which her cousin had thrown there. It was a valuable ring, bearing a ruby on it between two small diamonds. Such at least, she became aware, had been its bearing; but one of the side stones had been knocked out by the violence with which the ring had been flung. She searched even for this, scorching her face and eyes, but in vain. Then she made up her mind that the diamond should be lost forever, and that it should go out among the cinders into the huge dust-heaps of the metropolis. Better that, though it was distasteful to her feminine economy, than the other alternative of setting the servants to search, and thereby telling them something of what had been done.

When her search was over, she placed the ring on the mantelpiece; but she knew that it would not do to leave it there,—so she folded it up carefully in a

new sheet of note-paper, and put it in the drawer of her desk. After that she sat herself down at the table to think what she would do; but her head was, in truth, racked with pain, and on that occasion she could bring her thoughts to no conclusion.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. CHEESACRE'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

When Mrs. Greenow was left alone in her lodgings, after the little entertainment which she had given to her two lovers, she sat herself down to think seriously over her affairs. There were three paths open before her. She might take Mr. Cheesacre, or she might take Captain Bellfield—or she might decide that she would have nothing more to say to either of them in the way of courting. They were very persistent, no doubt; but she thought that she would know how to make them understand her, if she should really make up her mind that she would have neither one nor the other. She was going to leave Norwich after Easter, and they knew that such was her purpose. Something had been said of her returning to Yarmouth in the summer. She was a just woman at heart, and justice required that each of them should know what was to be his prospect if she did so return.

There was a good deal to be said on Mr. Cheesacre's behalf. Mahogany-furnitured bedrooms assist one's comfort in this life; and heaps of manure, though they are not brilliant in romance, are very efficacious in farming. Mrs. Greenow by no means despised these things; and as for the owner of them, though she saw that there was much amiss in his character, she thought that his little foibles were of such a nature

that she, as his wife, or any other woman of spirit, might be able to repress them, if not to cure them. But she had already married for money once, as she told herself very plainly on this occasion, and she thought that she might now venture on a little love. Her marriage for money had been altogether successful. The nursing of old Greenow had not been very disagreeable to her, nor had it taken longer than she had anticipated. She had now got all the reward that she had ever promised herself, and she really did feel grateful to his memory. I almost think that among those plentiful tears some few drops belonged to sincerity. She was essentially a happy-tempered woman, blessed with a good digestion, who looked back upon her past life with contentment, and forward to her future life with confidence. She would not be greedy, she said to herself. She did not want more money, and therefore she would have none of Mr. Cheesacre. So far she resolved,—resolving also that, if possible, the mahogany-furnitured bedrooms should be kept in the family, and made over to her niece, Kate Vavasor.

But should she marry for love? and if so, should Captain Bellfield be the man? Strange to say, his poverty and his scampishness and his lies almost recommended him to her. At any rate, it was not of those things that she was afraid. She had a woman's true belief in her own power, and thought that she could cure them,—as far as they needed cure. As for his stories about Inkerman, and his little debts, she cared nothing about that. She also had her Inkermans, and was quite aware that she made as good use of them as the captain did of his. And as for the debts,—what was a man to do who had n't got any

money? She also had owed for her gloves and corsets in the ante-Greenow days of her adventures. But there was this danger,—that there might be more behind of which she had never heard. Another Mrs. Bellfield was not impossible; and what, if instead of being a real captain at all, he should be a returned ticket-of-leave man! Such things had happened. Her chief security was in this,—that Cheesacre had known the man for many years, and would certainly have told anything against him that he did know. Under all these circumstances, she could not quite make up her mind either for or against Captain Bellfield.

Between nine and ten in the evening, an hour or so after Mr. Cheesacre had left her, Jeannette brought to her some arrowroot with a little sherry in it. She usually dined early, and it was her habit to take a light repast before she retired for the night.

"Jeannette," she said, as she stirred the lumps of white sugar in the bowl, "I 'm afraid those two gentlemen have quarrelled."

"Oh, laws, ma'am, in course they have! How was they to help it?"

Jeannette, on these occasions, was in the habit of standing beside the chair of her mistress, and chatting with her; and then, if the chatting was much prolonged, she would gradually sink down upon the corner of a chair herself,—and then the two women would be very comfortable together over the fire, Jeannette never forgetting that she was the servant, and Mrs. Greenow never forgetting that she was the mistress.

"And why should they quarrel, Jeannette? It 's very foolish."

"I don't know about being foolish, ma'am; but

it 's the most natural thing in life. If I had two beaux as was a courting me together, in course I should expect as they would punch each other's heads. There 's some girls do it a purpose, because they like to see it. One at a time 's what I say."

"You 're a young thing, Jeannette."

"Well, ma'am—yes; I am young, no doubt. But I won't say but what I 've had a beau, young as I look."

"But you don't suppose that I want beaux, as you call them?"

"I don't know, ma'am, as you wants 'em exactly. That 's as may be. There they are; and if they was to blow each other's brains out in the gig to-night, I should n't be a bit surprised for one. There 's nothing won't quiet them at Oilymead to-night, if brandy and water don't do it." As she said this, Jeannette slipped into her chair, and held up her hands in token of the intensity of her fears.

"Why, you silly child, they 're not going home together at all. Did not the captain go away first?"

"The captain did go away first, certainly; but I thought perhaps it was to get his pistols and fighting things ready."

"They won't fight, Jeannette. Gentlemen have given over fighting."

"Have they, ma'am? That makes it much easier for ladies, no doubt. Perhaps them peaceable ways will come down to such as us in time. It 'd be a comfort, I know, to them as are quiet given, like me. I hate to see men knocking each other's heads about,—I do. So Mr. Cheesacre and the captain won't fight, ma'am?"

"Of course they won't, you little fool, you."

"Dear, dear; I was so sure we should have had the papers all full of it,—and perhaps one of them stretched upon his bloody bier! I wonder which it would have been? I always made up my mind that the captain would n't be wounded in any of his wital parts—unless it was his heart, you know, ma'am."

"But why should they quarrel at all, Jeannette? It is the most foolish thing."

"Well, ma'am, I don't know about that. What else is they to do? There 's some things as you can cry halves about, but there 's no crying halves about this."

"About what, Jeannette?"

"Why, about you, ma'am."

"Jeannette, I wonder how you can say such things; as if I, in my position, had ever said a word to encourage either of them. You know it 's not true, Jeannette, and you should n't say so." Whereupon Mrs. Greenow put her handkerchief to her eyes, and Jeannette, probably in token of contrition, put her apron to hers.

"To be sure, ma'am, no lady could have behaved better through it than you have done, and goodness knows you have been tried hard."

"Indeed I have, Jeannette."

"And if gentlemen will make fools of themselves, it is n't your fault; is it, ma'am?"

"But I 'm so sorry that they should quarrel. They were such dear friends, you know;—quite all in all to each other."

"When you 've settled which it 's to be, ma'am, that 'll all come right again,—seeing that gentlefolks like them have given up fighting, as you say." Then

there was a little pause. "I suppose, ma'am, it won't be Mr. Cheesacre? To be sure, he 's a man as is uncommonly well to do in the world."

"What 's all that to me, Jeannette? I shall ever regard Mr. Cheesacre as a dear friend who has been very good to me at a time of trouble; but he 'll never be more than that."

"Then it 'll be the captain, ma'am? I 'm sure, for my part, I 've always thought the captain was the nicer gentleman of the two,—and have always said so."

"He 's nothing to me, girl."

"And as for money,—what 's the good of having more than enough? If he can bring love, you can bring money; can't you, ma'am?"

"He 's nothing to me, girl," repeated Mrs. Greenow.

"But he will be?" said Jeannette, plainly asking a question.

"Well, I 'm sure! What 's the world come to, I wonder, when you sit yourself down there, and cross-examine your mistress in that way! Get to bed, will you? It 's near ten o'clock."

"I hope I have n't said anything amiss, ma'am;" and Jeannette rose from her seat.

"It 's my fault for encouraging you," said Mrs. Greenow. "Go downstairs and finish your work, do; and then take yourself off to bed. Next week we shall have to be packing up, and there 'll be all my things to see to before that." So Jeannette got up and departed, and after some few further thoughts about Captain Bellfield, Mrs. Greenow herself went to her bedroom.

Mr. Cheesacre, when he drove back to Oilymead alone from Norwich, after dining with Mrs. Greenow,

had kept himself hot, and almost comfortable, with passion against Bellfield; and his heat, if not his comfort, had been sustained by his seeing the captain, with his portmanteau, escaping just as he reached his own homestead. But early on the following morning his mind reverted to Mrs. Greenow, and he remembered, with anything but satisfaction, some of the hard things which she had said to him. He had made mistakes in his manner of wooing. He was quite aware of that now, and was determined that they should be rectified for the future. She had rebuked him for having said nothing about his love. He would instantly mend that fault. And she had bidden him not to be so communicative about his wealth. Henceforth he would be dumb on that subject. Nevertheless, he could not but think that the knowledge of his circumstances which the lady already possessed, must be of service to him. "She can't really like a poor beggarly wretch who has n't got a shilling," he said to himself. He was very far from feeling that the battle was already lost. Her last word to him had been an assurance of her friendship; and then why should she have been at so much trouble to tell him the way in which he ought to address her if she were herself indifferent as to his addresses? He was, no doubt, becoming tired of his courtship, and heartily wished that the work were over; but he was not minded to give it up. He therefore prepared himself for another attack, and took himself into Norwich without seeking counsel from any one. He could not trust himself to think that she could really wish to refuse him after all the encouragement she had given him. On this occasion he put on no pink shirt or shiny boots, being deterred from doing

so by a remembrance of Captain Bellfield's ridicule; but, nevertheless, he dressed himself with considerable care. He clothed his nether person in knickerbockers, with tight, leathern, bright-coloured gaiters round his legs, being conscious of certain manly graces and symmetrical proportions which might, as he thought, stand him in good stead. And he put on a new shooting-coat, the buttons on which were elaborate, and a wonderful waistcoat worked over with foxes' heads. He completed his toilet with a round, low-crowned hat, with dogskin gloves, and a cutting whip. Thus armed he went forth resolved to conquer or to die,—as far as death might result from any wound which Mrs. Greenow might be able to give him. He waited, on this occasion, for the coming of no market-day; indeed, the journey into the city was altogether special, and he was desirous that she should know that such was the case. He drove at a great pace into the inn-yard, threw his reins to the ostler, took just one glass of cherry-brandy at the bar, and then marched off across the market-place to the Close, with quiet and decisive steps.

"Is that you, Cheesacre?" said a friendly voice, in one of the narrow streets. "Who expected to see you in Norwich on a Thursday?" It was Grimsby, the son of old Grimsby of Hatherwich, a country gentleman, and one, therefore, to whom Cheesacre would generally pay much respect; but on this occasion he did not even pull up for an instant, or moderate his pace. "A little bit of private business," he said, and marched onwards with his head towards the Close. "I 'm not going to be afraid of a woman—not if I know it," he said to himself; but, neverthe-

less, at a certain pastrycook's, of whose shop he had knowledge, he pulled up and had another glass of cherry-brandy.

"Mrs. Greenow is at home," he said to Jeannette, not deigning to ask any question.

"Oh yes, sir; she is at home," said Jeannette, conscious that some occasion had arrived; and in another second he was in the presence of his angel.

"Mr. Cheesacre, whoever expected to see you in Norwich on a Thursday?" said the lady, as she welcomed him, using almost the same words as his friend had done in the street. Why should not he come into Norwich on a Thursday, as well as any one else? Did they suppose that he was tied forever to his ploughs and carts? He was minded to conduct himself with a little spirit on this occasion, and to improve the opinion which Mrs. Greenow had formed about him. On this account he answered her somewhat boldly.

"There 's no knowing when I may be in Norwich, Mrs. Greenow, or when I may n't. I 'm one of those men of whom nobody knows anything certain, except that I pay as I go." Then he remembered that he was not to make any more boasts about his money, and he endeavoured to cover the error. "There 's one other thing they may all know if they please, but we won't say what that is just at present."

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Cheesacre?"

"Well,—thank you,—I will sit down for a few minutes, if you 'll let me, Mrs. Greenow. Mrs. Greenow, I 'm in such a state of mind that I must put an end to it, or else I shall be going mad, and doing somebody a damage."

"Dear me! what has happened to you? You 're

going out shooting, presently; are you not?" and Mrs. Greenow looked down at his garments.

"No, Mrs. Greenow, I 'm not going out shooting. I put on these things because I thought I might take a shot as I came along. But I could n't bring myself to do it, and then I would n't take them off again. What does it matter what a man wears?"

"Not in the least, so long as he is decent."

"I 'm sure I 'm always that, Mrs. Greenow."

"Oh dear, yes. More than that, I should say. I consider you to be rather gay in your attire."

"I don't pretend to anything of that kind, Mrs. Greenow. I like to be nice, and all that kind of thing. There are people who think that because a man farms his own land, he must be always in the muck. It is the case, of course, with those who have to make their rent and living out of it." Then he remembered that he was again treading on forbidden ground, and stopped himself. "But it don't matter what a man wears if his heart is n't easy within him."

"I don't know why you should speak in that way, Mr. Cheesacre; but it 's what I have felt every hour since—since Greenow left me."

Mr. Cheesacre was rather at a loss to know how he should begin. This allusion to the departed one did not at all assist him. He had so often told the widow that care killed a cat, and that a live dog was better than a dead lion; and had found so little efficacy in the proverbs, that he did not care to revert to them. He was aware that some more decided method of proceeding was now required. Little hints at love-making had been all very well in the earlier days of their acquaintance; but there must be something more

than little hints before he could hope to bring the matter to a favourable conclusion. The widow herself had told him that he ought to talk about love; and he had taken two glasses of cherry-brandy, hoping that they might enable him to do so. He had put on a coat with brilliant buttons, and new knickerbockers, in order that he might be master of the occasion. He was resolved to call a spade a spade, and to speak boldly of his passion; but how was he to begin? There was the difficulty. He was now seated in a chair, and there he remained silent for a minute or two, while she smoothed her eyebrows with her handkerchief after her last slight ebullition of grief.

"Mrs. Greenow," he exclaimed at last, jumping up before her; "dearest Mrs. Greenow; darling Mrs. Greenow, will you be my wife? There! I have said it at last, and I mean it. Everything that I 've got shall be yours. Of course I speak specially of my hand and heart. As for love;—oh, Arabella, if you only knew me! I don't think there 's a man in Norfolk better able to love a woman than I am. Ever since I first saw you at Yarmouth, I 've been in love to that extent that I 've not known what I 've been about. If you 'll ask them at home, they 'll tell you that I 've not been able to look after anything about the place,—not as it should be done. I have n't really. I don't suppose I 've opened the wages book half a dozen times since last July."

"And has that been my fault, Mr. Cheesacre?"

"Upon my word it has. I can't move about anywhere without thinking about you. My mind 's made up; I won't stay at Oilymead unless you will come and be its mistress."

"Not stay at Oilymead?"

"No, indeed. I 'll let the place, and go and travel somewheres. What 's the use of my hanging on there without the woman of my heart? I could n't do it, Mrs. Greenow; I could n't, indeed. Of course I 've got everything there that money can buy,—but it 's all of no use to a man that 's in love. Do you know, I 've come quite to despise money and stock, and all that sort of thing. I have n't had my banker's book home these last three months. Only think of that now."

"But how can I help you, Mr. Cheesacre?"

"Just say one word, and the thing 'll be done. Say you 'll be my wife? I 'll be so good to you. I will, indeed. As for your fortune, I don't care that for it! I 'm not like somebody else; it 's yourself I want. You shall be my pet, and my poppet, and my dearest little duck all the days of your life."

"No, Mr. Cheesacre; it cannot be."

"And why not? Look here, Arabella!" At these words he rose from his chair, and coming immediately before her, went down on both knees so close to her as to prevent the possibility of her escaping from him. There could be no doubt as to the efficacy of the cherry-brandy. There he was, well down on his knees; but he had not got down so low without some little cracking and straining on the part of the gaiters with which his legs were encompassed. He, in his passion, had probably omitted to notice this; but Mrs. Greenow, who was more cool in her present temperament, was painfully aware that he might not be able to rise with ease.

"Mr. Cheesacre, don't make a fool of yourself. Get up," said she.

"Never, till you have told me that you will be mine!"

"Then you 'll remain there forever, which will be inconvenient. I won't have you take hold of my hand, Mr. Cheesacre. I tell you to have done." Whereupon his grasp upon her hand was released; but he made no attempt to rise.

"I never saw a man look so much like a fool in my life," said she. "If you don't get up, I 'll push you over. There; don't you hear? There 's somebody coming."

But Cheesacre, whose senses were less acute than the lady's, did not hear. "I 'll never get up," said he, "till you have bid me hope."

"Bid you play the fiddle. Get away from my knees, at any rate. There;—he 'll be in the room now before——"

Cheesacre now did hear a sound of steps, and the door was opened while he made his first futile attempt to get back to a standing position. The door was opened, and Captain Bellfield entered. "I beg ten thousand pardons," said he; "but as I did not see Jeannette, I ventured to come in. May I venture to congratulate my friend Cheesacre on his success?"

In the meantime Cheesacre had risen; but he had done so slowly, and with evident difficulty. "I 'll trouble you to leave the room, Captain Bellfield," said he. "I 'm particularly engaged with Mrs. Greenow, as any gentleman might have seen."

"There was n't the slightest difficulty in seeing it, old fellow," said the captain. "Shall I wish you joy?"

"I 'll trouble you to leave the room, sir," said Cheesacre, walking up to him.

"Certainly, if Mrs. Greenow will desire me to do so," said the captain.

Then Mrs. Greenow felt herself called upon to speak.

"Gentlemen, I must beg that you will not make my drawing-room a place for quarrelling. Captain Bellfield, lest there should be any misconception, I must beg you to understand that the position in which you found Mr. Cheesacre was one altogether of his own seeking. It was not with my consent that he was there."

"I can easily believe that, Mrs. Greenow," said the captain.

"Who cares what you believe, sir?" said Mr. Cheesacre.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen! this is really unkind. Captain Bellfield, I think I had better ask you to withdraw."

"By all means," said Mr. Cheesacre.

"As it is absolutely necessary that I should give Mr. Cheesacre a definite answer after what has occurred——"

"Of course," said Captain Bellfield, preparing to go. "I 'll take another opportunity of paying my respects to you. Perhaps I might be allowed to come this evening?"

To this Mrs. Greenow half assented with an uncertain nod, and then the captain went. As soon as the door was closed behind his back, Mr. Cheesacre again prepared to throw himself into his former position, but to this Mrs. Greenow decidedly objected. If he were allowed to go down again, there was no knowing what force might be necessary to raise him. "Mr. Cheesacre," she said, "let there be an end to this little farce between us."

"Farce!" said he, standing with his hand on his heart, and his legs and knickerbockers well displayed.

"It is certainly either a farce or a mistake. If the latter,—and I have been at all to blame,—I ask your pardon most sincerely."

"But you 'll be Mrs. Cheesacre; won't you?"

"No, Mr. Cheesacre; no. One husband is enough for any woman, and mine lies buried at Birmingham."

"Oh, damn it!" said he, in utter disgust at this further reference to Mr. Greenow. The expression at such a moment militated against courtesy; but even Mrs. Greenow herself felt that the poor man had been subjected to provocation.

"Let us part friends," said she, offering him her hand.

But he turned his back upon her, for there was a something in his eye that he wanted to hide. I believe that he really did love her, and that at this moment he would have taken her, even though he had learned that her fortune was gone.

"Will you not give me your hand," said she, "in token that there is no anger between us?"

"Do think about it again—do!" said he. "If there 's anything you would like to have changed, I 'll change it at once. I 'll give up Oilymead altogether, if you don't like being so near the farm-yard. I 'll give up anything; so I will. Mrs. Greenow, if you only knew how I 've set my heart upon it!" And now, though his back was turned, the whimpering of his voice told plainly that tears were in his eyes.

She was a little touched. No woman would feel disposed to marry a man simply because he cried, and perhaps few women would be less likely to give way to such tenderness than Mrs. Greenow. She understood

men and women too well, and had seen too much both of the world's rough side and of its smooth side to fall into such a blunder as that; but she was touched. "My friend," she said, putting her hand upon his arm, "think no more of it."

"But I can't help thinking of it," said he, almost blubbering in his earnestness.

"No, no, no," said she, still touching him with her hand. "Why, Mr. Cheesacre, how can you bring yourself to care for an old woman like me, when so many pretty young ladies would give their eyes to get a kind word from you?"

"I don't want any young lady," said he.

"There 's Charlie Fairstairs, who would make as good a wife as any girl I know."

"Psha! Charlie Fairstairs, indeed!" The very idea of having such a bride palmed off upon him did something to restore him to his manly courage.

"Or my niece, Kate Vavasor, who has a nice little fortune of her own, and who is as accomplished as she is good-looking."

"She 's nothing to me, Mrs. Greenow."

"That 's because you never asked her to be anything. If I get her to come back to Yarmouth next summer, will you think about it? You want a wife, and you could n't do better if you searched all England over. It would be so pleasant for us to be such near friends; would n't it?" And again she put her hand upon his arm.

"Mrs. Greenow, just at present there 's only one woman in the world that I can think of."

"And that 's my niece."

"And that 's yourself. I 'm a broken-hearted man,

—I am, indeed. I did n't ever think I should feel so much about a thing of the kind—I did n't, really. I hardly know what to do with myself; but I suppose I 'd better go back to Oilymead." He had become so painfully unconscious of his new coat and his knickerbockers that it was impossible not to pity him. "I shall always hate the place now," he said—"always."

"That will pass away. You 'd be as happy as a king there, if you 'd take Kate for your queen."

"And what 'll you do, Mrs. Greenow?"

"What shall I do?"

"Yes; what will you do?"

"That is, if you marry Kate? Why, I 'll come and stay with you half my time, and nurse the children, as an old grand-aunt should."

"But about——" Then he hesitated, and she asked him of what he was thinking.

"You don't mean to take that man Bellfield, do you?"

"Come, Mr. Cheesacre, that 's rank jealousy. What right can you have to ask me whether I shall take any man or no man? The chances are that I shall remain as I am till I 'm carried to my grave; but I 'm not going to give any pledge about it to you or to any one."

"You don't know that man, Mrs. Greenow; you don't, indeed. I tell it you as your friend. Does not it stand to reason, when he has got nothing in the world, that he must be a beggar? It 's all very well saying that when a man is courting a lady he should n't say much about his money; but you won't make me believe that any man will make a good husband who has n't got a shilling. And for lies, there 's no beating him!"

"Why, then, has he been such a friend of yours?"

"Well, because I 've been foolish. I took up with him just because he looked pleasant, I suppose."

"And you want to prevent me from doing the same thing."

"If you were to marry him, Mrs. Greenow, it 's my belief I should do him a mischief; it is, really. I don't think I could stand it;—a mean, skulking beggar! I suppose I 'd better go now?"

"Certainly, if that 's the way you choose to talk about my friends."

"Friends, indeed! Well, I won't say any more at present. I suppose if I was to talk forever it would n't be any good?"

"Come and talk to Kate Vavasor forever, Mr. Cheesacre."

To this he made no reply, but went forth from the house, and got his gig, and drove himself home to Oilymead, thinking of his disappointment with all the bitterness of a young lover. "I did n't ever think I should ever care so much about anything," he said, as he took himself up to bed that night.

That evening Captain Bellfield did call in the Close, as he had said he would do, but he was not admitted. "Her mistress was very bad with a headache," Jeannette said.

CHAPTER XXII.

PREPARATIONS FOR LADY MONK'S PARTY.

Early in April, the Easter recess being all over, Lady Monk gave a grand party in London. Lady Monk's town house was in Gloucester Square. It was a large mansion, and Lady Monk's parties in London were known to be very great affairs. She usually gave two or three in the season, and spent a large portion of her time and energy in so arranging matters that her parties should be successful. As this was her special line in life, a failure would have been very distressing to her;—and we may also say very disgraceful, taking into consideration, as we should do in forming our judgment on the subject, the very large sums of Sir Cosmo's money which she spent in this way. But she seldom did fail. She knew how to select her days, so as not to fall foul of other events. It seldom happened that people could not come to her because of a division which occupied all the members of Parliament, or that they were drawn away by the superior magnitude of some other attraction in the world of fashion. This giving of parties was her business, and she had learned it thoroughly. She worked at it harder than most men work at their trades, and let us hope that the profits were consolatory.

It was generally acknowedged to be the proper thing to go to Lady Monk's parties. There were certain

people who were asked, and who went as a matter of course,—people who were by no means on intimate terms with Lady Monk, or with Sir Cosmo; but they were people to have whom was the proper thing, and they were people who understood that to go to Lady Monk's was the proper thing for them. The Duchess of St. Bungay was always there, though she hated Lady Monk, and Lady Monk always abused her; but a card was sent to the Duchess in the same way as the Lord Mayor invites a Cabinet Minister to dinner, even though the one man might believe the other to be a thief. And Mrs. Conway Sparkes was generally there; she went everywhere. Lady Monk did not at all know why Mrs. Conway Sparkes was so favoured by the world; but there was the fact, and she bowed to it. Then there was another set, the members of which were or were not invited, according to circumstances at the time; and these were the people who were probably the most legitimate recipients of Lady Monk's hospitality. Old family friends of her husband were among the number. Let the Tuftons come in April, and perhaps again in May; then they will not feel their exclusion from that seventh heaven of glory,—the great culminating crush in July. Scores of young ladies who really loved parties belonged to this set. Their mothers and aunts knew Lady Monk's sisters and cousins. They accepted so much of Lady Monk's good things as she vouchsafed them, and were thankful. Then there was another lot, which generally became, especially on that great July occasion, the most numerous of the three. It comprised all those who made strong interest to obtain admittance within her ladyship's house,—who struggled and fought almost

with tooth and nail to get invitations. Against these people Lady Monk carried on an internecine war. Had she not done so she would have been swamped by them, and her success would have been at an end; but yet she never dreamed of shutting her doors against them altogether, or of saying boldly that none such should hamper her staircases. She knew that she must yield, but her effort was made to yield to as few as might be possible. When she was first told by her factotum in these operations that Mr. Bott wanted to come, she positively declined to have him. When it was afterwards intimated to her that the Duchess of St. Bungay had made a point of it, she sneered at the Duchess, and did not even then yield. But when at last it was brought home to her understanding that Mr. Palliser wished it, and that Mr. Palliser probably would not come himself unless his wishes were gratified, she gave way. She was especially anxious that Lady Glencora should come to her gathering, and she knew that Lady Glencora could not be had without Mr. Palliser.

It was very much desired by her that Lady Glencora should be there.

"Burgo," said she to her nephew, one morning, "look here."

Burgo was at the time staying with his aunt, in Gloucester Square, much to the annoyance of Sir Cosmo, who had become heartily tired of his nephew. The aunt and the nephew had been closeted together more than once lately, and perhaps they understood each other better now than they had done down at Monkshade. The aunt had handed a little note to Burgo, which he read and then threw back to her.

"You see that she is not afraid of coming," said Lady Monk.

"I suppose she does n't think much about it," said Burgo.

"If that 's what you really believe, you 'd better give it up. Nothing on earth would justify such a step on your part except a thorough conviction that she is attached to you."

Burgo looked at the fireplace, almost savagely, and his aunt looked at him very keenly. "Well," she said, "if there 's to be an end of it, let there be an end of it."

"I think I 'd better hang myself," he said.

"Burgo, I will not have you here if you talk to me in that way. I am trying to help you once again; but if you look like that, and talk like that, I will give it up."

"I think you 'd better give it up."

"Are you becoming cowardly at last? With all your faults I never expected that of you."

"No; I am not a coward. I 'd go out and fight him at two paces' distance with the greatest pleasure in the world."

"You know that 's nonsense, Burgo. It 's downright braggadocio. Men do not fight now; nor at any time would a man be called upon to fight, because you simply wanted to take his wife from him. If you had done it, indeed!"

"How am I to do it? I 'd do it to-morrow if it depended on me. No one can say that I 'm afraid of anybody or of anything."

"I suppose something in the matter depends on her?"

"I believe she loves me,—if you mean that."

"Look here, Burgo," and the considerate aunt gave

to the impoverished and ruined nephew such counsel as she, in accordance with her lights, was enabled to bestow. "I think you were much wronged in that matter. After what had passed I thought that you had a right to claim Lady Glencora as your wife. Mr. Palliser, in my mind, behaved very wrongly in stepping in between you and—you and such a fortune as hers, in that way. He cannot expect that his wife should have any affection for him. There is nobody alive who has a greater horror of anything improper in married women than I have. I have always shown it. When Lady Madeline Madtop left her husband, I would never allow her to come inside my doors again, —though I have no doubt he ill-used her dreadfully, and there was nothing ever proved between her and Colonel Graham. One can't be too particular in such matters. But here, if you,—if you can succeed, you know, I shall always regard the Palliser episode in Lady Glencora's life as a tragical accident. I shall, indeed. Poor dear! It was done exactly as they make nuns of girls in Roman Catholic countries; and as I should think no harm of helping a nun out of her convent, so I should think no harm of helping her now. If you are to say anything to her, I think you might have an opportunity at the party."

Burgo was still looking at the fireplace; and he sat on, looking and still looking, but he said nothing.

"You can think of what I have said, Burgo," continued his aunt, meaning that he should get up and go. But he did not go. "Have you anything more that you wish to say to me?" she asked.

"I 've got no money," said Burgo, still looking at the fireplace.

Lady Glencora's property was worth not less than fifty thousand a year. He was a young man ambitious of obtaining that almost incredible amount of wealth, and who once had nearly reached it, by means of her love. His present obstacle consisted in his want of a twenty-pound note! "I 've got no money." The words were growled out rather than spoken, and his eyes were never turned even for a moment towards his aunt's face.

"You 've never got any money," said she, speaking almost with passion.

"How can I help it? I can't make money. If I had a couple of hundred pounds, so that I could take her, I believe that she would go with me. It should not be my fault if she did not. It would have been all right if she had come to Monkshade."

"I 've got no money for you, Burgo. I have not five pounds belonging to me."

"But you 've got——"

"What?" said Lady Monk, interrupting him sharply.

"Would Cosmo lend it me?" said he, hesitating to go on with that suggestion which he had been about to make. The Cosmo of whom he spoke was not his uncle, but his cousin. No eloquence could have induced his uncle, Sir Cosmo, to lend him another shilling. But the son of the house was a man rich with his own wealth, and Burgo had not taxed him for some years.

"I do not know," said Lady Monk. "I never see him. Probably not."

"It is hard," said Burgo. "Fancy that a man should be ruined for two hundred pounds, just at such a moment of his life as this!" He was a man bold by

nature, and he did make his proposition. "You have jewels, aunt;—could you not raise it for me? I would redeem them with the very first money that I got."

Lady Monk rose in a passion when the suggestion was first made, but before the interview was over she had promised that she would endeavour to do something in the way of raising money for him yet once again. He was her favourite nephew, and the same almost to her as a child of her own. With one of her own children indeed she had quarrelled, and of the other, a married daughter, she rarely saw much. Such love as she had to give she gave to Burgo, and she promised him the money though she knew that she must raise it by some villainous falsehood to her husband.

On the same morning Lady Glencora went to Queen Anne Street with the purpose of inducing Alice to go to Lady Monk's party; but Alice would not accede to the proposition, though Lady Glencora pressed it with all her eloquence.

"I don't know her," said Alice.

"My dear," said Lady Glencora, "that 's absurd. Half the people there won't know her."

"But they know her set, or know her friends,—or, at any rate, will meet their own friends at her house. I should only bother you, and should not in the least gratify myself."

"The fact is, everybody will go who can, and I should have no sort of trouble in getting a card for you. Indeed I should simply write a note and say I meant to bring you."

"Pray don't do any such thing, for I certainly shall not go. I can't conceive why you should wish it."

"Mr. Fitzgerald will be there," said Lady Glencora, altering her voice altogether, and speaking in that low tone with which she used to win Alice's heart down at Matching. She was sitting close over the fire, leaning low, holding up her little hands as a screen to her face, and looking at her companion earnestly. "I 'm sure that he will be there, though nobody has told me."

"That may be a reason for your staying away," said Alice slowly, "but hardly a reason for my going with you."

Lady Glencora would not condescend to tell her friend in so many words that she wanted her protection. She could not bring herself to say that, though she wished it to be understood. "Ah! I thought you would have gone," said she.

"It would be contrary to all my habits," said Alice. "I never go to people's houses when I don't know them. It 's a kind of society which I don't like. Pray do not ask me."

"Oh! very well. If it must be so, I won't press it." Lady Glencora had moved the position of one of her hands so as to get it to her pocket, and there had grasped a letter, which she still carried; but when Alice said those last cold words, "Pray do not ask me," she released the grasp, and left the letter where it was. "I suppose he won't bite me, at any rate," she said, and she assumed that look of childish drollery which she would sometimes put on, almost with a grimace, but still with so much prettiness that no one who saw her would regret it.

"He certainly can't bite you, if you will not let him."

"Do you know, Alice, though they all say that Plantagenet is one of the wisest men in London, I

sometimes think that he is one of the greatest fools. Soon after we came to town I told him that we had better not go to that woman's house. Of course he understood me. He simply said that he wished that I should do so. 'I hate anything out of the way,' he said. 'There can be no reason why my wife should not go to Lady Monk's house as well as to any other.' There was an end of it, you know, as far as anything I could do was concerned. But there was n't an end of it with him. He insists that I shall go, but he sends my duenna with me. Dear Mrs. Marsham is to be there!"

"She 'll do you no harm, I suppose?"

"I 'm not so sure of that, Alice. In the first place, one does n't like to be followed everywhere by a policeman, even though one is n't going to pick a pocket. And then, the devil is so strong within me, that I should like to dodge the policeman. I can fancy a woman being driven to do wrong simply by a desire to show her policeman that she can be too many for him."

"Glencora, you make me so wretched when you talk like that."

"Will you go with me, then, so that I may have a policeman of my own choosing? He asked me if I would mind taking Mrs. Marsham with me in my carriage. So I up and spoke, very boldly, like the proud young porter, and told him I would not; and when he asked why not, I said that I preferred taking a friend of my own,—a young friend, I said, and I then named you or my cousin, Lady Jane. I told him I should bring one or the other."

"And was he angry?"

"No; he took it very quietly,—saying something, in

his calm way, about hoping that I should get over a prejudice against one of his earliest and dearest friends. He twits at me because I don't understand Parliament and the British Constitution, but I know more of them than he does about a woman. You are quite sure you won't go, then?" Alice hesitated a moment. "Do," said Lady Glencora; and there was an amount of persuasion in her accent which should, I think, have overcome her cousin's scruples.

"It is against the whole tenor of my life's way," she said. "And, Glencora, I am not happy myself. I am not fit for parties. I sometimes think that I shall never go into society again."

"That 's nonsense, you know."

"I suppose it is, but I cannot go now. I would if I really thought——"

"Oh, very well," said Lady Glencora, interrupting her. "I suppose I shall get through it. If he asks me to dance, I shall stand up with him, just as though I had never seen him before." Then she remembered the letter in her pocket,—remembered that at this moment she bore about with her a written proposition from this man to go off with him and leave her husband's house. She had intended to show it to Alice on this occasion; but as Alice had refused her request, she was glad that she had not done so. "You 'll come to me the morning after," said Lady Glencora, as she went. This Alice promised to do; and then she was left alone.

Alice regretted,—regretted deeply that she had not consented to go with her cousin. After all, of what importance had been her objection when compared with the cause for which her presence had been de-

sired? Doubtless she would have been uncomfortable at Lady Monk's house; but could she not have borne some hour or two of discomfort on her friend's behalf? But, in truth, it was only after Lady Glencora had left her that she began to understand the subject fully, and to feel that she might possibly have been of service in a great danger. But it was too late now. Then she strove to comfort herself with the reflection that a casual meeting at an evening party in London could not be perilous in the same degree as a prolonged sojourn together in a country-house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW LADY GLENCORA WENT TO LADY MONK'S PARTY.

Lady Monk's house in Gloucester Square was admirably well adapted for the giving of parties. It was a large house, and seemed to the eyes of guests to be much larger than it was. The hall was spacious, and the stairs went up in the centre, facing you as you entered the inner hall. Round the top of the stairs there was a broad gallery, with an ornamented railing, and from this opened the doors into the three reception-rooms. There were two on the right, the larger of which looked out backwards, and these two were connected by an archway, as though made for folding-doors; but the doors, I believe, never were there. Fronting the top of the staircase there was a smaller room, looking out backwards, very prettily furnished, and much used by Lady Monk when alone. It was here that Burgo had held that conference with his aunt of which mention has been made. Below stairs there was the great dining-room, on which, on these occasions, a huge buffet was erected for refreshments,—what I may call a masculine buffet, as it was attended by butlers and men in livery,—and there was a smaller room looking out into the square, in which there was a feminine battery for the dispensing of tea and such like smaller good things, and from which female aid could be attained for the arrangement or mending of

dresses in a further sanctum within it. For such purposes as that now on foot the house was most commodious. Lady Monk, on these occasions, was moved by a noble ambition to do something different from that done by her neighbours in similar circumstances, and therefore she never came forward to receive her guests. She ensconced herself, early in the evening, in that room at the head of the stairs, and there they who chose to see her made their way up to her, and spoke their little speeches. They who thought her to be a great woman,—and many people did think her to be great,—were wont to declare that she never forgot those who did come, or those who did not. And even they who desired to describe her as little,—for even Lady Monk had enemies,—would hint that though she never came out of the room, she would rise from her chair and make a step towards the door whenever any name very high in fashionable life greeted her ears. So that a mighty Cabinet Minister, or a duchess in great repute, or any special wonder of the season, could not fail of entering her precincts and being seen there for a few moments. It would, of course, happen that the doorway of her chamber would become blocked; but there were precautions taken to avoid this inconvenience as far as possible, and one man in livery was employed to go backwards and forwards between his mistress and the outer world, so as to keep the thread of a passage open.

But though Lady Monk was in this way enabled to rest herself during her labours, there was much in her night's work which was not altogether exhilarating. Ladies would come into her small room and sit there by the hour, with whom she had not the slightest wish

to hold conversation. The Duchess of St. Bungay would always be there,—so that there was a special seat in one corner of the room which was called the Duchess's stool. "I should n't care a straw about her," Lady Monk had been heard to complain, "if she would talk to anybody. But nobody will talk to her, and then she listens to everything."

There had been another word or two between Burgo Fitzgerald and his aunt before the evening came, a word or two in the speaking of which she had found some difficulty. She was prepared with the money,—with that two hundred pounds for which he had asked,—obtained with what wiles, and lies, and baseness of subterfuge I need not stop here to describe. But she was by no means willing to give this over into her nephew's hands without security. She was willing to advance him this money; she had been willing even to go through unusual dirt to get it for him; but she was desirous that he should have it only for a certain purpose. How could she bind him down to spend it as she would have it spent? Could she undertake to hand it to him as soon as Lady Glencora should be in his power? Even though she could have brought herself to say as much,—and I think she might almost have done so after what she had said,—she could not have carried out such a plan. In that case the want would be instant, and the action must be rapid. She therefore had no alternative but to entrust him with the bank-notes at once.

"Burgo," she said, "if I find that you deceive me now, I will never trust you again."

"All right," said Burgo, as he barely counted the money before he thrust it into his breast-pocket.

"It is lent to you for a certain purpose, should you happen to want it," she said solemnly.

"I do happen to want it very much," he answered.

She did not dare to say more; but as her nephew turned away from her with a step that was quite light in its gaiety, she almost felt that she was already cozened. Let Burgo's troubles be as heavy as they might be, there was something to him ecstatic in the touch of ready money which always cured them for the moment.

On the morning of Lady Monk's party a few very uncomfortable words passed between Mr. Palliser and his wife.

"Your cousin is not going, then?" said he.

"Alice is not going."

"Then you can give Mrs. Marsham a seat in your carriage?"

"Impossible, Plantagenet. I thought I had told you that I had promised my cousin Jane."

"But you can take three."

"Indeed I can't,—unless you would like me to sit out with the coachman."

There was something in this,—a tone of loudness, a touch of what he called to himself vulgarity,—which made him very angry. So he turned away from her, and looked as black as a thunder-cloud.

"You must know, Plantagenet," she went on, "that it is impossible for three women dressed to go out in one carriage. I am sure you would n't like to see me afterwards if I had been one of them."

"You need not have said anything to Lady Jane when Miss Vavasor refused. I had asked you before that."

"And I had told you that I liked going with young women, and not with old ones. That 's the long and the short of it."

"Glencora, I wish you would not use such expressions."

"What! not the long and the short? It 's good English. Quite as good as Mr. Bott's, when he said in the House the other night that the Government kept their accounts in a higgledy-piggledy way. You see, I have been studying the debates, and you should n't be angry with me."

"I am not angry with you. You speak like a child to say so. Then, I suppose, the carriage must go for Mrs. Marsham after it has taken you?"

"It shall go before. Jane will not be in a hurry, and I am sure I shall not."

"She will think you very uncivil; that is all. I told her that she could go with you when I heard that Miss Vavasor was not to be there."

"Then, Plantagenet, you should n't have told her so, and that 's the long——; but I must n't say that. The truth is this, if you give me any orders I 'll obey them,—as far as I can. If I can't I 'll say so. But if I 'm left to go by my own judgment, it 's not fair that I should be scolded afterwards."

"I have never scolded you."

"Yes, you have. You have told me that I was uncivil."

"I said that she would think you so."

"Then, if it 's only what she thinks, I don't care two straws about it. She may have the carriage to herself if she likes, but she shan't have me in it,—not unless I 'm ordered to go. I don't like her, and I won't pre-

tend to like her. My belief is that she follows me about to tell you if she thinks that I do wrong."

"Glencora!"

"And that odious baboon with the red bristles does the same thing,—only he goes to her because he does n't dare to go to you."

Plantagenet Palliser was struck with wild dismay. He understood well who it was whom his wife intended to describe; but that she should have spoken of any man as a baboon with red bristles, was terrible to his mind! He was beginning to think that he hardly knew how to manage his wife. And the picture she had drawn was very distressing to him. She had no mother; neither had he; and he had wished that Mrs. Marsham should give to her some of that matronly assistance and guidance which a mother does give to her young married daughter. It was true, too, as he knew, that a word or two as to some socially domestic matters had filtered through to him from Mr. Bott, down at Matching Priory, but only in such a way as to enable him to see what counsel it was needful that he should give. As for espionage over his wife, —no man could despise it more than he did! No man would be less willing to resort to it! And now his wife was accusing him of keeping spies, both male and female.

"Glencora!" he said again; and then he stopped, not knowing what to say to her.

"Well, my dear, it 's better you should know at once what I feel about it. I don't suppose I 'm very good; indeed, I dare say I 'm bad enough, but these people about me won't make me any better. The duennas don't make the Spanish ladies worth much."

"Duennas!" After that, Lady Glencora sat herself down, and Mr. Palliser stood for some moments looking at her.

It ended in his making her a long speech, in which he said a good deal of his own justice and forbearance, and something also of her frivolity and childishness. He told her that his only complaint of her was that she was too young, and, as he did so, she made a little grimace,—not to him, but to herself, as though saying to herself that that was all he knew about it. He did not notice it, or, if he did, his notice did not stop his eloquence. He assured her that he was far from keeping any watch over her, and declared that she had altogether mistaken Mrs. Marsham's character. Then there was another little grimace. "There 's somebody has mistaken it worse than I have," the grimace said. Of the bristly baboon he condescended to say nothing, and he wound up by giving her a cold kiss, and saying that he would meet her at Lady Monk's.

When the evening came,—or rather the night,—the carriage went first for Mrs. Marsham, and having deposited her at Lady Monk's, went back to Park Lane for Lady Glencora. Then she had herself driven to St. James's Square, to pick up Lady Jane, so that altogether the coachman and horses did not have a good time of it. "I wish he 'd keep a separate carriage for her," Lady Glencora said to her cousin Jane,—having perceived that her servants were not in a good humour. "That would be expensive," said Lady Jane. "Yes, it would be expensive," said Lady Glencora. She would not condescend to make any remark as to the non-importance of such expense to a man so wealthy as her husband, knowing that his wealth was, in fact,

hers. Never to him or to any other,—not even to herself,—had she hinted that much was due to her because she had been magnificent as an heiress. There were many things about this woman that were not altogether what a husband might wish. She was not softly delicate in all her ways; but in disposition and temper she was altogether generous. I do not know that she was at all points a lady, but had Fate so willed it she would have been a thorough gentleman.

Mrs. Marsham was by no means satisfied with the way in which she was treated. She would not have cared to go at all to Lady Monk's party had she supposed that she would have to make her entry there alone. With Lady Glencora she would have seemed to receive some of that homage which would certainly have been paid to her companion. The carriage called, moreover, before she was fully ready, and the footman, as he stood at the door to hand her in, had been very sulky. She understood it all. She knew that Lady Glencora had positively declined her companionship; and if she resolved to be revenged, such resolution on her part was only natural. When she reached Lady Monk's house, she had to make her way upstairs all alone. The servants called her Mrs. Marsh, and under that name she got passed on into the front drawing-room. There she sat down, not having seen Lady Monk, and meditated over her injuries.

It was past eleven before Lady Glencora arrived, and Burgo Fitzgerald had begun to think that his evil stars intended that he should never see her again. He had been wickedly baulked at Monkshade, by what influence he had never yet ascertained; and now he thought that the same influence must be at work to

keep her again away from his aunt's house. He had settled in his mind no accurate plan of a campaign; he had in his thought no fixed arrangement by which he might do the thing which he meditated. He had attempted to make some such plan; but, as is the case with all men to whom thinking is an unusual operation, concluded at last that he had better leave it to the course of events. It was, however, obviously necessary that he should see Lady Glencora before the course of events could be made to do anything for him. He had written to her, making his proposition in bold terms, and he felt that if she were utterly decided against him, her anger at his suggestion, or at least her refusal, would have been made known to him in some way. Silence did not absolutely give consent, but it seemed to show that consent was not impossible. From ten o'clock to past eleven he stood about on the staircase of his aunt's house, waiting for the name which he was desirous of hearing, and which he almost feared to hear. Men spoke to him, and women also, but he hardly answered. His aunt once called him into her room, and with a cautionary frown on her brow, bade him go and dance. "Don't look so dreadfully preoccupied," she said to him in a whisper. But he shook his head at her, almost savagely, and went away, and did not dance. Dance! How was he to dance with such an enterprise as that upon his mind? Even to Burgo Fitzgerald the task of running away with another man's wife had in it something which prevented dancing. Lady Monk was older, and was able to regulate her feelings with more exactness. But Burgo, though he could not dance, went down into the dining-room and drank. He took a large beer-glass full of

champagne, and soon after that another. The drink did not flush his cheeks, or make his forehead red, or bring out the sweat-drops on his brow, as it does with some men; but it added a peculiar brightness to his blue eyes. It was by the light of his eyes that men knew when Burgo had been drinking.

At last, while he was still in the supper-room, he heard Lady Glencora's name announced. He had already seen Mr. Palliser come in and make his way upstairs some quarter of an hour before; but as to that he was indifferent. He had known that the husband was to be there. When the long-expected name reached his ears, his heart seemed to jump within him. What, on the spur of the moment, should he do? As he had resolved that he would be doing,—that something should be done, let it be what it might,—he hurried to the dining-room door, and was just in time to see and be seen as Lady Glencora was passing up the stairs. She was just above him as he got himself out into the hall, so that he could not absolutely greet her with his hand; but he looked up at her, and caught her eye. He looked up, and moved his hand to her in token of salutation. She looked down at him, and the expression of her face altered visibly as her glance met his. She barely bowed to him,—with her eyes rather than with her head, but he flattered himself that there was, at any rate, no anger in her countenance. How beautiful he was as he gazed up at her, leaning against the wall as he stood, and watching her as she made her slow way up the stairs! She felt that his eyes were on her, and where the stairs turned she could not restrain herself from one other glance. As her eyes fell on his again, his mouth opened, and she fancied that

she could hear the faint sigh that he uttered. It was a glorious mouth, such as the old sculptors gave to their marble gods! And Burgo, if it was so that he had not heart enough to love truly, could look as though he loved. It was not in him deceit,—or what men call acting. The expression came to him naturally, though it expressed so much more than there was within; as strong words come to some men who have no knowledge that they are speaking strongly. At this moment Burgo Fitzgerald looked as though it were possible that he might die of love.

Lady Glencora was met at the top of the stairs by Lady Monk, who came out to her, almost into the gallery, with her sweetest smile,—so that the newly arrived guest, of course, entered into the small room. There sat the Duchess of St. Bungay on her stool in the corner, and there, next to the Duchess, but at the moment engaged in no conversation, stood Mr. Bott. There was another lady there who stood very high in the world, and whom Lady Monk was very glad to welcome—the young Marchioness of Hartletop. She was in slight mourning; for her father-in-law, the late Marquis, had died not yet quite six months since. Very beautiful she was, and one whose presence at their houses ladies and gentlemen prized alike. She never said silly things, like the Duchess, never was troublesome as to people's conduct to her, was always gracious, yet was never led away into intimacies, was without peer the best-dressed woman in London, and yet gave herself no airs;—and then she was so exquisitely beautiful. Her smile was loveliness itself. There were, indeed, people who said that it meant nothing; but then, what should the smile of a young married

woman mean? She had not been born in the purple, like Lady Glencora, her father being a country clergyman who had never reached a higher grade than that of an archdeacon; but she knew the ways of high life, and what an exigeant husband would demand of her, much better than poor Glencora. She would have spoken of no man as a baboon with a bristly beard. She never talked of the long and the short of it. She did not wander out o' nights in winter among the ruins. She made no fast friendship with ladies whom her lord did not like. She had once, indeed, been approached by a lover since she had been married,—Mr. Palliser himself having been the offender,—but she had turned the affair to infinite credit and profit, had gained her husband's closest confidence by telling him of it all, had yet not brought on any hostile collision, and had even dismissed her lover without annoying him. But then Lady Hartletop was a miracle of a woman!

Lady Glencora was no miracle. Though born in the purple, she was made of ordinary flesh and blood, and as she entered Lady Monk's little room, hardly knew how to recover herself sufficiently for the purposes of ordinary conversation.

"Dear Lady Glencora, do come in for a moment to my den. We were so sorry not to have you at Monkshade. We heard such terrible things about your health."

Lady Glencora said that it was only a cold—a bad cold.

"Oh yes; we heard,—something about moonlight and ruins. So like you, you know. I love that sort of thing, above all people; but it does n't do; does it? Circumstances are so exacting. I think you know

Lady Hartletop;—and there 's the Duchess of St. Bungay. Mr. Palliser was here five minutes since." Then Lady Monk was obliged to get to her door again, and Lady Glencora found herself standing close to Lady Hartletop.

"We saw Mr. Palliser just pass through," said Lady Hartletop, who was able to meet and speak of the man who had dared to approach her with his love, without the slightest nervousness.

"Yes; he said he should be here," said Lady Glencora.

"There 's a great crowd," said Lady Hartletop. "I did n't think London was so full."

"Very great," said Lady Glencora, and then they had said to each other all that society required. Lady Glencora, as we know, could talk with imprudent vehemence by the hour together if she liked her companion; but the other lady seldom committed herself by more words than she had uttered now,—unless it was to her tirewoman.

"How *very* well you *are* looking!" said the Duchess. "And I heard you had been *so* ill." Of that midnight escapade among the ruins it was fated that Lady Glencora should never hear the last.

"How d' ye do, Lady Glencowrer?" sounded in her ear, and there was a great red paw stuck out for her to take. But after what had passed between Lady Glencora and her husband to-day about Mr. Bott, she was determined that she would not take Mr. Bott's hand.

"How are you, Mr. Bott?" she said. "I think I 'll look for Mr. Palliser in the back room."

"Dear Lady Glencora," whispered the Duchess, in

an ecstasy of agony. Lady Glencora turned and bowed her head to her stout friend. "Do let me go away with you. There 's that woman, Mrs. Conway Sparkes, coming, and you know how I hate her." She had nothing to do but to take the Duchess under her wing, and they passed into the large room together. It is, I think, more than probable that Mrs. Conway Sparkes had been brought in by Lady Monk as the only way of removing the Duchess from her stool.

Just within the dancing-room Lady Glencora found her husband, standing in a corner, looking as though he were making calculations.

"I 'm going away," said he, coming up to her. "I only just came because I said I would. Shall you be late?"

"Oh no; I suppose not."

"Shall you dance?"

"Perhaps once,—just to show that I 'm not an old woman."

"Don't heat yourself. Good-bye." Then he went, and in the crush of the doorway he passed Burgo Fitzgerald, whose eye was intently fixed upon his wife. He looked at Burgo, and some thought of that young man's former hopes flashed across his mind,—some remembrance, too, of a caution that had been whispered to him; but for no moment did a suspicion come to him that he ought to stop and watch by his wife.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW LADY GLENCORA CAME BACK FROM LADY MONK'S PARTY.

Burgo Fitzgerald remained for a minute or two leaning where we last saw him,—against the dining-room wall at the bottom of the staircase; and as he did so some thoughts that were almost solemn passed across his mind. This thing that he was about to do, or to attempt,—was it in itself a good thing, and would it be good for her whom he pretended to love? What would be her future if she consented now to go with him, and to divide herself from her husband? Of his own future he thought not at all. He had never done so. Even when he had first found himself attracted by the reputation of her wealth, he cannot be said to have looked forward in any prudential way to coming years. His desire to put himself in possession of so magnificent a fortune had simply prompted him, as he might have been prompted to play for a high stake at a gaming-table. But now, during these moments, he did think a little of her. Would she be happy, simply because he loved her, when all women should cease to acknowledge her; when men would regard her as one degraded and dishonoured; when society should be closed against her; when she would be driven to live loudly because the softness and graces of quiet life would be denied to her? Burgo knew well what must

be the nature of such a woman's life in such circumstances. Would Glencora be happy with him while living such a life, simply because he loved her? And, under such circumstances, was it likely that he would continue to love her? Did he not know himself to be the most inconstant of men, and the least trustworthy? Leaning thus against the wall at the bottom of the stairs he did ask himself all these questions with something of true feeling about his heart, and almost persuaded himself that he had better take his hat and wander forth anywhere into the streets. It mattered little what might become of himself. If he could drink himself out of the world, it might be an end of things that would be not altogether undesirable.

But then the remembrance of his aunt's two hundred pounds came upon him, which money he even now had about him on his person, and a certain idea of honour told him that he was bound to do that for which the money had been given to him. As to telling his aunt that he had changed his mind, and, therefore, refunding the money—no such thought as that was possible to him! To give back two hundred pounds entire,—two hundred pounds which were already within his clutches, was not within the compass of Burgo's generosity. Remembering the cash, he told himself that hesitation was no longer possible to him. So he gathered himself up, stretched his hands over his head, uttered a sigh that was audible to all around him, and took himself upstairs.

He looked in at his aunt's room, and then he saw her and was seen by her. "Well, Burgo," she said, with her sweetest smile, "have you been dancing?" He turned away from her without answering her,

muttering something between his teeth about a cold-blooded Jezebel,—which, if she had heard it, would have made her think him the most ungrateful of men. But she did not hear him, and smiled still as he went away, saying something to Mrs. Conway Sparkes as to the great change for the better which had taken place in her nephew's conduct.

"There 's no knowing who may not reform," said Mrs. Sparkes, with an emphasis which seemed to Lady Monk to be almost uncourteous.

Burgo made his way first into the front room and then into the larger room where the dancing was in progress, and there he saw Lady Glencora standing up in a quadrille with the Marquis of Hartletop. Lord Hartletop was a man not much more given to conversation than his wife, and Lady Glencora seemed to go through her work with very little gratification either in the dancing or in the society of her partner. She was simply standing up to dance, because, as she had told Mr. Palliser, ladies of her age generally do stand up on such occasions. Burgo watched her as she crossed and re-crossed the room, and at last she was aware of his presence. It made no change in her, except that she became even somewhat less animated than she had been before. She would not seem to see him, nor would she allow herself to be driven into a pretence of a conversation with her partner because he was there. "I will go up to her at once, and ask her to waltz," Burgo said to himself, as soon as the last figure of the quadrille was in action. "Why should I not ask her as well as any other woman?" Then the music ceased, and after a minute's interval Lord Hartletop took away his partner on his arm into another room. Burgo, who

had been standing near the door, followed them at once. The crowd was great, so that he could not get near them or even keep them in sight, but he was aware of the way in which they were going.

It was five minutes after this when he again saw her, and then she was seated on a cane bench in the gallery, and an old woman was standing close to her, talking to her. It was Mrs. Marsham cautioning her against some petty imprudence, and Lady Glencora was telling that lady that she needed no such advice, in words almost as curt as those I have used. Lord Hartletop had left her, feeling that, as far as that was concerned, he had done his duty for the night. Burgo knew nothing of Mrs. Marsham,—had never seen her before, and was quite unaware that she had any special connection with Mr. Palliser. It was impossible, he thought, to find Lady Glencora in a better position for his purpose, so he made his way up to her through the crowd, and muttering some slight inaudible word, offered her his hand.

"That will do very well, thank you, Mrs. Marsham," Lady Glencora said at this moment. "Pray do not trouble yourself," and then she gave her hand to Fitzgerald. Mrs. Marsham, though unknown to him, knew with quite sufficient accuracy who he was, and all his history, as far as it concerned her friend's wife. She had learned the whole story of the loves of Burgo and Lady Glencora. Though Mr. Palliser had never mentioned that man's name to her, she was well aware that her duty as a duenna would make it expedient that she should keep a doubly wary eye upon him should he come near the sheepfold. And there he was, close to them, almost leaning over them, with the hand of

his late lady love,—the hand of Mr. Palliser's wife,—within his own! How Lady Glencora might have carried herself at this moment had Mrs. Marsham not been there, it is bootless now to surmise; but it may be well understood that under Mrs. Marsham's immediate eye all her resolution would be in Burgo's favour. She looked at him softly and kindly, and though she uttered no articulate word, her countenance seemed to show that the meeting was not unpleasant to her.

"Will you waltz?" said Burgo,—asking it not at all as though it were a special favour,—asking it exactly as he might have done had they been in the habit of dancing with each other every other night for the last three months.

"I don't think Lady Glencora will waltz to-night," said Mrs. Marsham, very stiffly. She certainly did not know her business as a duenna, or else the enormity of Burgo's proposition had struck her so forcibly as to take away from her all her presence of mind. Otherwise, she must have been aware that such an answer from her would surely drive her friend's wife into open hostility.

"And why not, Mrs. Marsham?" said Lady Glencora, rising from her seat. "Why should n't I waltz to-night? I rather think I shall, the more especially as Mr. Fitzgerald waltzes very well." Thereupon she put her hand upon Burgo's arm.

Mrs. Marsham made still a little effort,—a little effort that was probably involuntary. She put out her hand, and laid it on Lady Glencora's left shoulder, looking into her face as she did so with all the severity of caution of which she was mistress. Lady Glencora shook her duenna off angrily. Whether she would put

her fate into the hands of this man who was now touching her, or whether she would not, she had not as yet decided; but of this she was very sure, that nothing said or done by Mrs. Marsham should have any effect in restraining her.

What could Mrs. Marsham do? Mr. Palliser was gone. Some rumour of that proposed visit to Monkshade, and the way in which it had been prevented, had reached her ear. Some whispers had come to her that Fitzgerald still dared to love, as married, the woman whom he had loved before she was married. There was a rumour about that he still had some hope. Mrs. Marsham had never believed that Mr. Palliser's wife would really be false to her vows. It was not in fear of any such catastrophe as a positive elopement that she had taken upon herself the duty of duenna. Lady Glencora would, no doubt, require to be pressed down into that decent mould which it would become the wife of a Mr. Palliser to assume as her form; and this pressing down, and this moulding, Mrs. Marsham thought that she could accomplish. It had not hitherto occurred to her that she might be required to guard Mr. Palliser from positive dishonour; but now —now she hardly knew what to think about it. What should she do? To whom should she go? And then she saw Mr. Bott looming large before her on the top of the staircase.

In the meantime Lady Glencora went off towards the dancers, leaning on Burgo's arm. "Who is that woman?" said Burgo. They were the first words he spoke to her, though since he had last seen her he had written to her that letter which even now she carried about her. His voice in her ears sounded as it used

to sound when their intimacy had been close, and questions such as that he had asked were common between them. And her answer was of the same nature. "Oh, such an odious woman!" she said. "Her name is Mrs. Marsham; she is my bête noire." And then they were actually dancing, whirling round the room together, before a word had been said of that which was Burgo's settled purpose, and which at some moments was her settled purpose also.

Burgo waltzed excellently, and in old days, before her marriage, Lady Glencora had been passionately fond of dancing. She seemed to give herself up to it now as though the old days had come back to her. Lady Monk, creeping to the intermediate door between her den and the dancing-room, looked in on them, and then crept back again. Mrs. Marsham and Mr. Bott, standing together just inside the other door, near to the staircase, looked on also—in horror.

"He should n't have gone away and left her," said Mr. Bott, almost hoarsely.

"But who could have thought it?" said Mrs. Marsham. "I 'm sure I did n't."

"I suppose you 'd better tell him?" said Mr. Bott.

"But I don't know where to find him," said Mrs. Marsham.

"I did n't mean now at once," said Mr. Bott;—and then he added, "Do you think it is as bad as that?"

"I don't know what to think," said Mrs. Marsham.

The waltzers went on till they were stopped by want of breath. "I am so much out of practice," said Lady Glencora; "I did n't think—I should have been able—to dance at all." Then she put up her face and slightly opened her mouth, and stretched her nostrils,

—as ladies do as well as horses when the running has been severe and they want air.

"You 'll take another turn?" said he.

"Presently," said she, beginning to have some thought in her mind as to whether Mrs. Marsham was watching her. Then there was a little pause, after which he spoke in an altered voice.

"Does it put you in mind of old days?" said he.

It was, of course, necessary for him that he should bring her to some thought of the truth. It was all very sweet, that dancing with her, as they used to dance, without any question as to the reason why it was so; that sudden falling into the old habits, as though everything between this night and the former nights had been a dream; but this would not further his views. The opportunity had come to him which he must use, if he intended ever to use such opportunity. There was the two hundred pounds in his pocket, which he did not intend to give back.

"Does it put you in mind of old days?" he said.

The words roused her from her sleep at once, and dissipated her dream. The facts all rushed upon her in an instant; the letter in her pocket; the request which she had made to Alice, that Alice might be induced to guard her from this danger; the words which her husband had spoken to her in the morning, and her anger against him in that he had subjected her to the eyes of a Mrs. Marsham; her own unsettled mind —quite unsettled whether it would be best for her to go or stay! It all came upon her now at the first word of tenderness which Burgo spoke to her.

It has often been said of woman that she who doubts is lost,—so often that they who say it now, say

it simply because others have said it before them, never thinking whether or no there be any truth in the proverb. But they who have said so, thinking of their words as they were uttered, have known but little of women. Women doubt every day, who solve their doubts at last on the right side, driven to do so, some by fear, more by conscience, but most of them by that half-prudential, half-unconscious knowledge of what is fitting, useful, and best under the circumstances, which rarely deserts either men or women till they have brought themselves to the Burgo Fitzgerald state of recklessness. Men, when they have fallen even to that, will still keep up some outward show towards the world; but women in this condition defy the world, and declare themselves to be children of perdition. Lady Glencora was doubting sorely; but, though doubting, she was not as yet lost.

"Does it put you in mind of old days?" said Burgo.

She was driven to answer, and she knew that much would be decided by the way in which she might now speak. "You must not talk of that," she said, very softly.

"May I not?" And now his tongue was unloosed, so that he began to speak quickly. "May I not? And why not? They were happy days,—so happy! Were not you happy when you thought——? Ah, dear! I suppose it is best not even to think of them?"

"Much the best."

"Only it is impossible. I wish I knew the inside of your heart, Cora, so that I could see what it is that you really wish."

In the old days he had always called her Cora, and now the name came from his lips upon her ears as

'I see a pair of eyes looking at us.'

a thing of custom, causing no surprise. They were standing back, behind the circle, almost in a corner, and Burgo knew well how to speak at such moments so that his words should be audible to none but her whom he addressed.

"You should not have come to me at all," she said.

"And why not? Who has a better right to come to you? Who has ever loved you as I have done? Cora, did you get my letter?"

"Come and dance," she said; "I see a pair of eyes looking at us." The pair of eyes which Lady Glencora saw were in the possession of Mr. Bott, who was standing alone, leaning against the side of the doorway, every now and then raising his heels from the ground, so that he might look down upon the sinners as from a vantage ground. He was quite alone. Mrs. Marsham had left him, and had gotten herself away in Lady Glencora's own carriage to Park Lane, in order that she might find Mr. Palliser there, if by chance he should be at home.

"Won't it be making mischief?" Mrs. Marsham had said when Mr. Bott had suggested this line of conduct.

"There 'll be worse mischief if you don't," Mr. Bott had answered. "He can come back, and then he can do as he likes. I 'll keep my eyes upon them." And so he did keep his eyes upon them.

Again they went round the room,—or that small portion of the room which the invading crowd had left to the dancers,—as though they were enjoying themselves thoroughly, and in all innocence. But there were others besides Mr. Bott who looked on and wondered. The Duchess of St. Bungay saw it, and

shook her head sorrowing,—for the Duchess was good at heart. Mrs. Conway Sparkes saw it, and drank it down with keen appetite,—as a thirsty man with a longing for wine will drink champagne,—for Mrs. Conway Sparkes was not good at heart. Lady Hartletop saw it, and just raised her eyebrows. It was nothing to her. She liked to know what was going on, as such knowledge was sometimes useful; but, as for heart,—what she had was, in such a matter, neither good nor bad. Her blood circulated with its ordinary precision, and, in that respect, no woman ever had a better heart. Lady Monk saw it, and a frown gathered on her brow. "The fool!" she said to herself. She knew that Burgo would not help his success by drawing down the eyes of all her guests upon his attempt. In the meantime Mr. Bott stood there, mounting still higher on his toes, straightening his back against the wall.

"Did you get my letter?" Burgo said again, as soon as a moment's pause gave him breath to speak. She did not answer him. Perhaps her breath did not return to her as rapidly as his. But, of course, he knew that she had received it. She would have quickly signified to him that no letter from him had come to her hands had it not reached her. "Let us go out upon the stairs," he said, "for I must speak to you. Oh, if you could know what I suffered when you did not come to Monkshade! Why did you not come?"

"I wish I had not come here," she said.

"Because you have seen me? That, at any rate, is not kind of you."

They were now making their way slowly down the stairs, in the crowd, towards the supper-room. All the

world was now intent on food and drink, and they were only doing as others did. Lady Glencora was not thinking where she went, but, glancing upwards, as she stood for a moment wedged upon the stairs, her eyes met those of Mr. Bott. "A man that can treat me like that deserves that I should leave him." That was the thought that crossed her mind at the moment.

"I 'll get you some champagne with water in it," said Burgo. "I know that is what you like."

"Do not get me anything," she said. They had now got into the room, and had therefore escaped Mr. Bott's eyes for the moment. "Mr. Fitzgerald,"—and now her words had become a whisper in his ear,—"do what I ask you. For the sake of the old days of which you spoke, the dear old days which can never come again——"

"By G——! they can," said he. "They can come back, and they shall."

"Never. But you can still do me a kindness. Go away, and leave me. Go to the sideboard, and then do not come back. You are doing me an injury while you remain with me."

"Cora," he said.

But she had now recovered her presence of mind, and understood what was going on. She was no longer in a dream, but words and things bore to her again their proper meaning. "I will not have it, Mr. Fitzgerald," she answered, speaking almost passionately. "I will not have it. Do as I bid you. Go and leave me, and do not return. I tell you that we are watched." This was still true, for Mr. Bott had now again got his eyes on them, round the supper-room door. Whatever was the reward for which he

was working, private secretaryship or what else, it must be owned that he worked hard for it. But there are labours which are labours of love.

"Who is watching us?" said Burgo; "and what does it matter? If you are minded to do as I have asked you——"

"But I am not so minded. Do you not know that you insult me by proposing it?"

"Yes;—it is an insult, Cora,—unless such an offer be a joy to you. If you wish to be my wife instead of his, it is no insult."

"How can I be that?" Her face was not turned to him, and her words were half-pronounced, and in the lowest whisper, but, nevertheless, he heard them.

"Come with me,—abroad, and you shall yet be my wife. You got my letter? Do what I asked you, then. Come with me—to-night."

The pressing instance of the suggestion, the fixing of a present hour, startled her back to her propriety. "Mr. Fitzgerald," she said, "I asked you to go and leave me. If you do not do so, I must get up and leave you. It will be much more difficult."

"And is that to be all?"

"All;—at any rate, now." Oh, Glencora! how could you be so weak? Why did you add that word, "now"? In truth, she added it then, at that moment, simply feeling that she could thus best secure an immediate compliance with her request.

"I will not go," he said, looking at her sternly, and leaning before her, with earnest face, with utter indifference as to the eyes of any that might see them. "I will not go till you tell me that you will see me again."

"I will," she said in that low, all-but-unuttered whisper.

"When,—when,—when?" he asked.

Looking up again towards the doorway, in fear of Mr. Bott's eyes, she saw the face of Mr. Palliser as he entered the room. Mr. Bott had also seen him, and had tried to clutch him by the arm; but Mr. Palliser had shaken him off, apparently with indifference,—had got rid of him, as it were, without noticing him. Lady Glencora, when she saw her husband, immediately recovered her courage. She would not cower before him, or show herself ashamed of what she had done. For the matter of that, if he pressed her on the subject, she could bring herself to tell him that she loved Burgo Fitzgerald much more easily than she could whisper such a word to Burgo himself. Mr. Bott's eyes were odious to her as they watched her; but her husband's glance she could meet without quailing before it. "Here is Mr. Palliser," said she, speaking again in her ordinary clear-toned voice. Burgo immediately rose from his seat with a start, and turned quickly towards the door; but Lady Glencora kept her chair.

Mr. Palliser made his way as best he could through the crowd up to his wife. He, too, kept his countenance without betraying his secret. There was neither anger nor dismay in his face, nor was there any untoward hurry in his movement. Burgo stood aside as he came up, and Lady Glencora was the first to speak. "I thought you were gone home hours ago," she said.

"I did go home," he answered, "but I thought I might as well come back for you."

"What a model of a husband! Well; I am ready.

Only, what shall we do about Jane? Mr. Fitzgerald, I left a scarf in your aunt's room,—a little black and yellow scarf,—would you mind getting it for me?"

"I will fetch it," said Mr. Palliser; "and I will tell your cousin that the carriage shall come back for her."

"If you will allow me——" said Burgo.

"I will do it," said Mr. Palliser; and away he went, making his slow progress up through the crowd, ordering his carriage as he passed through the hall, and leaving Mr. Bott still watching at the door.

Lady Glencora resolved that she would say nothing to Burgo while her husband was gone. There was a touch of chivalry in his leaving them again together, which so far conquered her. He might have bade her leave the scarf, and come at once. She had seen, moreover, that he had not spoken to Mr. Bott, and was thankful to him also for that. Burgo also seemed to have become aware that his chance for that time was over.

"I will say good night," he said.

"Good night, Mr. Fitzgerald," she answered, giving him her hand. He pressed it for a moment, and then turned and went. When Mr. Palliser came back he was no more to be seen.

Lady Glencora was at the dining-room door when her husband returned, standing close to Mr. Bott. Mr. Bott had spoken to her, but she made no reply. He spoke again, but her face remained as immovable as though she had been deaf. "And what shall we do about Mrs. Marsham?" she said, quite out loud, as soon as she put her hand on her husband's arm. "I had forgotten her."

"Mrs. Marsham has gone home," he replied.

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

"When did you see her?"

"She came to Park Lane."

"What made her do that?"

These questions were asked and answered as he was putting her into the carriage. She got in just as she asked the last, and he, as he took his seat, did not find it necessary to answer it. But that would not serve her turn. "What made Mrs. Marsham go to you at Park Lane after she left Lady Monk's?" she asked again. Mr. Palliser sat silent, not having made up his mind what he would say on the subject. "I suppose she went," continued Lady Glencora, "to tell you that I was dancing with Mr. Fitzgerald. Was that it?"

"I think, Glencora, we had better not discuss it now."

"I don't mean to discuss it now, or ever. If you did not wish me to see Mr. Fitzgerald you should not have sent me to Lady Monk's. But, Plantagenet, I hope you will forgive me if I say that no consideration shall induce me to receive again as a guest, in my own house, either Mrs. Marsham or Mr. Bott."

Mr. Palliser absolutely declined to say anything on the subject on that occasion, and the evening of Lady Monk's party in this way came to an end.

CHAPTER XXV.

BOLD SPECULATIONS ON MURDER.

George Vavasor was not in a very happy mood when he left Queen Anne Street, after having flung his gift ring under the grate. Indeed there was much in his condition, as connected with the house which he was leaving, which could not but make him unhappy. Alice was engaged to be his wife, and had as yet said nothing to show that she meditated any breach of that engagement, but she had treated him in a way which made him long to throw her promise in her teeth. He was a man to whom any personal slight from a woman was unendurable. To slights from men, unless they were of a nature to provoke offence, he was indifferent. There was no man living for whose liking or disliking George Vavasor cared anything. But he did care much for the good opinion, or rather for the personal favour, of any woman to whom he had endeavoured to make himself agreeable. "I will marry you," Alice had said to him,—not in words, but in acts and looks, which were plainer than words,—"I will marry you for certain reasons of my own, which in my present condition make it seem that that arrangement will be more convenient to me than any other that I can make; but pray understand that there is no love mixed up with this. There is another man whom I love;—only, for those reasons above hinted, I do not care to marry

him." It was thus that he read Alice's present treatment of him, and he was a man who could not endure this treatment with ease.

But though he could throw his ring under the grate in his passion, he could not so dispose of her. That he would have done so had his hands been free, we need not doubt. And he would have been clever enough to do so in some manner that would have been exquisitely painful to Alice, willing as she might be to be released from her engagement. But he could not do this to a woman whose money he had borrowed, and whose money he could not repay;—to a woman more of whose money he intended to borrow immediately. As to that latter part of it, he did say to himself over and over again, that he would have no more of it. As he left the house in Queen Anne Street, on that occasion, he swore that under no circumstances would he be indebted to her for another shilling. But before he had reached Great Marlborough Street, to which his steps took him, he had reminded himself that everything depended on a further advance. He was in Parliament, but Parliament would be dissolved within three months. Having sacrificed so much for his position, should he let it all fall from him now,—now, when success seemed to be within his reach? That wretched old man in Westmoreland, who seemed gifted almost with immortality,—why could he not die and surrender his paltry acres to one who could use them? He turned away from Regent Street into Hanover Square before he crossed to Great Marlborough Street, giving vent to his passion rather than arranging his thoughts. As he walked the four sides of the square he considered how good it would be if some

accident should befall the old man. How he would rejoice were he to hear to-morrow that one of the trees of the "accursed place" had fallen on the "obstinate old idiot," and put an end to him! I will not say that he meditated the murder of his grandfather. There was a firm conviction on his mind, as he thought of all this, that such a deed as that would never come in his way. But he told himself, that if he chose to make the attempt, he would certainly be able to carry it through without detection. Then he remembered Rush and Palmer,—the openly bold murderer and the secret poisoner. Both of them, in Vavasor's estimation, were great men. He had often said so in company. He had declared that the courage of Rush had never been surpassed. "Think of him," he would say with admiration, "walking into a man's house, with pistols sufficient to shoot every one there, and doing it as though he were killing rats! What was Nelson at Trafalgar to that? Nelson had nothing to fear!" And of Palmer he declared that he was a man of genius as well as courage. He had "looked the whole thing in the face," Vavasor would say, "and told himself that all scruples and squeamishness are bosh,—child's tales. And so they are. Who lives as though they fear either heaven or hell? And if we do live without such fear or respect, what is the use of telling lies to ourselves? To throw it all to the dogs, as Palmer did, is more manly." "And be hanged," some hearer of George's doctrine replied. "Yes, and be hanged, —if such is your destiny. But you hear of the one who is hanged, but hear nothing of the twenty who are not."

Vavasor walked round Hanover Square, nursing his

hatred against the old squire. He did not tell himself that he would like to murder his grandfather. But he suggested to himself, that if he desired to do so, he would have courage enough to make his way into the old man's room, and strangle him; and he explained to himself how he would be able to get down into Westmoreland without the world knowing that he had been there,—how he would find an entrance into the house by a window with which he was acquainted,—how he could cause the man to die as though those around him should think it was apoplexy,—he, George Vavasor, having read something on that subject lately. All this he considered very fully, walking rapidly round Hanover Square more than once or twice. If he were to become an active student in the Rush or Palmer school, he would so study the matter that he would not be the one that should be hung. He thought that he could, so far, trust his own ingenuity. But yet he did not meditate murder. "Beastly old idiot!" he said to himself, "he must have his chance as other men have, I suppose." And then he went across Regent Street to Mr. Scruby's office in Great Marlborough Street, not having, as yet, come to any positive conclusion as to what he would do in reference to Alice's money.

But he soon found himself talking to Mr. Scruby as though there were no doubts as to the forthcoming funds for the next election. And Mr. Scruby talked to him very plainly, as though those funds must be forthcoming before long. "A stitch in time saves nine," said Mr. Scruby, meaning to insinuate that a pound in time might have the same effect. "And I 'll tell you what, Mr. Vavasor, of course I 've my

outstanding bills for the last affair. That 's no fault of yours, for the things came so sharp one on another that my fellows have n't had time to make it out. But if you 'll put me in funds for what I must be out of pocket in June——"

"Will it be so soon as June?"

"They are talking of June. Why, then, I 'll lump the two bills together when it 's all over."

In their discussion respecting money Mr. Scruby injudiciously mentioned the name of Mr. Tombe. No precise caution had been given to him, but he had become aware that the matter was being managed through an agency that was not recognised by his client; and as that agency was simply a vehicle of money which found its way into Mr. Scruby's pocket, he should have held his tongue. But Mr. Tombe's name escaped from him, and Vavasor immediately questioned him. Scruby, who did not often make such blunders, readily excused himself, shaking his head, and declaring that the name had fallen from his lips instead of that of another man. Vavasor accepted the excuse without further notice, and nothing more was said about Mr. Tombe while he was in Mr. Scruby's office. But he had not heard the name in vain, and had unfortunately heard it before. Mr. Tombe was a remarkable man in his way. He wore powder to his hair,—was very polite in his bearing,—was somewhat asthmatic, and wheezed in his talking,—and was, moreover, the most obedient of men, though it was said of him that he managed the whole income of the Ely Chapter just as he pleased. Being in these ways a man of note, John Grey had spoken of him to Alice, and his name had filtered through Alice and her cousin Kate to George Vavasor.

George seldom forgot things or names, and when he heard Mr. Tombe's name mentioned in connection with his own money matters, he remembered that Mr. Tombe was John Grey's lawyer.

As soon as he could escape out into the street he endeavoured to put all these things together, and after a while resolved that he would go to Mr. Tombe. What if there should be an understanding between John Grey and Alice, and Mr. Tombe should be arranging his money matters for him! Would not anything be better than this,—even that little tragedy down in Westmoreland, for which his ingenuity and courage would be required? He could endure to borrow money from Alice. He might even endure it still,—though that was very difficult after her treatment of him; but he could not endure to be the recipient of John Grey's money. By heavens, no! And as he got into a cab, and had himself driven off to the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons, he gave himself credit for much fine manly feeling. Mr. Tombe's chambers were found without difficulty, and, as it happened, Mr. Tombe was there.

The lawyer rose from his chair as Vavasor entered, and bowed his powdered head very meekly as he asked his visitor to sit down. "Mr. Vavasor;—oh yes. He had heard the name. Yes; he was in the habit of acting for his very old friend Mr. John Grey. He had acted for Mr. John Grey, and for Mr. John Grey's father,—he or his partner,—he believed he might say for about half a century. There could not be a nicer gentleman than Mr. John Grey;—and such a pretty child as he used to be!" At every new sentence Mr. Tombe caught his poor asthmatic breath, and bowed

his meek old head, and rubbed his hands together as though he hardly dared to keep his seat in Vavasor's presence without the support of some such motion; and wheezed apologetically, and seemed to ask pardon of his visitor for not knowing intuitively what was the nature of that visitor's business. But he was a sly old fox was Mr. Tombe, and was considering all this time how much it would be well that he should tell Mr. Vavasor, and how much it would be well that he should conceal. "The fat had got into the fire," as he told his old wife when he got home that evening. He told his old wife everything, and I don't know that any of his clients were the worse for his doing so. But while he was wheezing, and coughing, and apologising, he made up his mind that if George Vavasor were to ask him certain questions, it would be best that he should answer them truly. If Vavasor did ask those questions, he would probably do so upon certain knowledge, and if so, why, in that case, lying would be of no use. Lying would not put the fat back into the frying-pan. And even though such questions might be asked without any absolute knowledge, they would, at any rate, show that the questioner had the means of ascertaining the truth. He would tell as little as he could; but he decided during his last wheeze, that he could not lie in the matter with any chance of benefiting his client. "The prettiest child I ever saw, Mr. Vavasor!" said Mr. Tombe, and then he coughed violently. Some people who knew Mr. Tombe declared that he nursed his cough.

"I dare say," said George.

"Yes, indeed,—ugh—ugh—ugh."

"Can you tell me, Mr. Tombe, whether either you

or he have anything to do with the payment of certain sums to my credit at Messrs. Hock and Block's?"

"Messrs. Hock and Block's, the bankers,—in Lom—bard Street?" said Mr. Tombe, taking a little more time.

"Yes; I bank there," said Vavasor sharply.

"A most respectable house."

"Has any money been paid there to my credit by you, Mr. Tombe?"

"May I ask why you put the question to me, Mr. Vavasor?"

"Well, I don't think you may. That is to say, my reason for asking it can have nothing to do with yours for replying to it. If you have had no hand in any such payment, there is an end of it, and I need not take up your time by saying anything more on the subject."

"I am not prepared to go that length, Mr. Vavasor, —not altogether to go that length,—ugh—ugh—ugh."

"Then will you tell me what you have done in the matter?"

"Well,—upon my word, you 've taken me a little by surprise. Let me see. Pinkle,—Pinkle." Pinkle was a clerk who sat in an inner room, and Mr. Tombe's effort to call him seemed to be most ineffectual. But Pinkle understood the sound, and came. "Pinkle, did n't we pay some money into Hock & Block's a few weeks since, to the credit of Mr. George Vavasor?"

"Did we, sir?" said Pinkle, who probably knew that his employer was an old fóx, and who, perhaps, had caught something of the fox nature himself.

"I think we did. Just look, Pinkle;—and, Pinkle, see the date, and let me know all about it. It 's fine

bright weather for this time of year, Mr. Vavasor; but these easterly winds!—ugh—ugh—ugh!"

Vavasor found himself sitting for an apparently interminable number of minutes in Mr. Tombe's dingy chamber, and was coughed at, and wheezed at, till he began to be tired of his position; moreover, when tired, he showed his impatience. "Perhaps you 'll let us write you a line when we have looked into the matter?" suggested Mr. Tombe.

"I 'd rather know at once," said Vavasor. "I don't suppose it can take you very long to find out whether you have paid money to my account, by order of Mr. Grey. At any rate, I must know before I go away."

"Pinkle, Pinkle!" screamed the old man through his coughing; and again Pinkle came. "Well, Pinkle, was anything of the kind done, or is my memory deceiving me?" Mr. Tombe was, no doubt, lying shamefully, for, of course, he remembered all about it; and, indeed, George Vavasor had learned already quite enough for his own purposes.

"I was going to look," said Pinkle; and Pinkle again went away.

"I 'm sorry to give your clerk so much trouble," said Vavasor, in an angry voice; "and I think it must be unnecessary. Surely you know whether Mr. Grey has commissioned you to pay money for me?"

"We have so many things to do, Mr. Vavasor; and so many clients. We have, indeed. You see, it is n't only one gentleman's affairs. But I think there was something done. I do, indeed."

"What is Mr. John Grey's address?" asked Vavasor, very sharply.

"Number 5, Suffolk Street, Pall Mall East," said

Mr. Tombe. Herein Mr. Tombe somewhat committed himself. His client, Mr. Grey, was, in fact, in town, but Vavasor had not known or imagined that such was the case. Had Mr. Tombe given the usual address of Nethercoats, nothing further would have been demanded from him on that subject. But he had foolishly presumed that the question had been based on special information as to his client's visit to London, and he had told the plain truth in a very simple way.

"Number 5, Suffolk Street," said Vavasor, writing down the address. "Perhaps it will be better that I should go to him, as you do not seem inclined to give me any information." Then he took up his hat, and hardly bowing to Mr. Tombe, left the chambers. Mr. Tombe, as he did so, rose from his chair, and bent his head meekly down upon the table.

"Pinkle, Pinkle," wheezed Mr. Tombe. "Never mind; never mind." Pinkle did n't mind; and we may say that he had not minded; for up to that moment he had taken no steps towards a performance of the order which had been given him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT OCCURRED IN SUFFOLK STREET, PALL MALL.

Mr. Tombe had gained nothing for the cause by his crafty silence. George Vavasor felt perfectly certain, as he walked out from the little street which runs at the back of Doctors' Commons, that the money which he had been using had come, in some shape, through the hands of John Grey. He did not care much to calculate whether the payments had been made from the personal funds of his rival, or whether that rival had been employed to dispense Alice's fortune. Under either view of the case his position was sufficiently bitter. The truth never for a moment occurred to him. He never dreamed that there might be a conspiracy in the matter, of which Alice was as ignorant as he himself had been. He never reflected that his Uncle John, together with John, the lover, whom he so hated, might be the conspirators. To him it seemed to be certain that Alice and Mr. Grey were in league;—and if they were in league, what must he think of Alice, and of her engagement with himself!

There are men who rarely think well of women,—who hardly think well of any woman. They put their mothers and sisters into the background,—as though they belonged to some sex or race apart,—and then declare to themselves and to their friends that all women are false,—that no woman can be trusted unless

her ugliness protect her; and that every woman may be attacked as fairly as may game in a cover, or deer on a mountain. What man does not know men who have so thought? I cannot say that such had been Vavasor's creed,—not entirely such. There had been periods of his life when he had believed implicitly in his cousin Alice;—but then there had been other moments in which he had ridiculed himself for his Quixotism in believing in any woman. And as he had grown older the moments of his Quixotism had become more rare. There would have been no such Quixotism left with him now, had not the various circumstances which I have attempted to describe filled him, during the last twelve months, with a renewed desire to marry his cousin. Every man tries to believe in the honesty of his future wife; and, therefore, Vavasor had tried, and had, in his way, believed. He had flattered himself, too, that Alice's heart had, in truth, been more prone to him than to that other suitor. Grey, as he thought, had been accepted by her cold prudence; but he thought, also, that she had found her prudence to be too cold, and had therefore returned where she had truly loved. Vavasor, though he did not love much himself, was willing enough to be the object of love.

This idea of his, however, had been greatly shaken by Alice's treatment of himself personally; but still he had not, hitherto, believed that she was false to him. Now, what could he believe of her? What was there within the compass of such a one to believe? As he walked out into St. Paul's Churchyard he called her by every name which is most offensive to a woman's ears. He hated her at this moment with even a more bitter hatred than that which he felt towards John Grey.

She must have deceived him with unparalleled hypocrisy, and lied to him and to his sister Kate as hardly any woman had ever lied before. Or could it be that Kate, also, was lying to him? If so, Kate also should be included in the punishment.

But why should they have conspired to feed him with these moneys? There had been no deceit, at any rate, in reference to the pounds sterling which Scruby had already swallowed. They had been supplied, whatever had been the motives of the suppliers; and he had no doubt that more would be supplied if he would only keep himself quiet. He was still walking westward as he thought of this, down Ludgate Hill, on his direct line towards Suffolk Street; and he tried to persuade himself that it would be well that he should hide his wrath till after provision should have been made for this other election. They were his enemies,—Alice and Mr. Grey,—and why should he keep any terms with his enemies? It was still a trouble to him to think that he should have been in any way beholden to John Grey; but the terrible thing had been done; the evil had occurred. What would he gain by staying his hand now? Still, however, he walked on quickly along Fleet Street, and along the Strand, and was already crossing under the Picture Galleries towards Pall Mall East before he had definitely decided what step he would take on this very day. Exactly at the corner of Suffolk Street he met John Grey.

"Mr. Grey," he said, stopping himself suddenly, "I was this moment going to call on you at your lodgings."

"At my lodgings, were you? Shall I return with you?"

"If you please," said Vavasor, leading the way up Suffolk Street. There had been no other greeting than this between them. Mr. Grey himself, though a man very courteous in his general demeanour, would probably have passed Vavasor in the street with no more than the barest salutation. Situated as they were towards each other there could hardly be any show of friendship between them; but when Vavasor had spoken to him, he had dressed his face in that guise of civility which men always use who do not intend to be offensive;—but Vavasor dressed his as men dress theirs who do mean to be offensive; and Mr. Grey had thoroughly appreciated the dressing.

"If you will allow me, I have the key," said Grey. Then they both entered the house, and Vavasor followed his host upstairs. Mr. Grey, as he went up, felt almost angry with himself in having admitted his enemy into his lodgings. He was sure that no good could come of it, and remembered, when it was too late, that he might easily have saved himself from giving the invitation while he was still in the street. There they were, however, together in the sitting-room, and Grey had nothing to do but to listen.

"Will you take a chair, Mr. Vavasor?" he said.

"No," said Vavasor; "I will stand up." And he stood up, holding his hat behind his back with his left hand, with his right leg forward, and the thumb of his right hand in his waistcoat-pocket. He looked full into Grey's face, and Grey looked full into his; and as he looked the great cicatrice seemed to open itself and to become purple with fresh blood stains.

"I have come here from Mr. Tombe's office in the City," said Vavasor, "to ask you of what nature has

been the interference which you have taken in my money matters?"

This was a question which Mr. Grey could not answer very quickly. In the first place it was altogether unexpected; in the next place he did not know what Mr. Tombe had told, and what he had not told; and then, before he replied, he must think how much of the truth he was bound to tell in answer to a question so put to him.

"Do you say that you have come from Mr. Tombe?" he asked.

"I think you heard me say so. I have come here direct from Mr. Tombe's chambers. He is your lawyer, I believe?"

"He is so."

"And I have come from him to ask you what interference you have lately taken in my money matters. When you have answered that, I shall have other questions to ask you."

"But, Mr. Vavasor, has it occurred to you that I may not be disposed to answer questions so asked?"

"It has not occurred to me to think that you will prevaricate. If there has been no such interference, I will ask your pardon, and go away; but if there has been such interference on your part, I have a right to demand that you shall explain to me its nature."

Grey had now made up his mind that it would be better that he should tell the whole story,—better not only for himself, but for all the Vavasors, including this angry man himself. The angry man evidently knew something, and it would be better that he should know the truth. "There has been such interference, Mr. Vavasor, if you choose to call it so. Money, to

the extent of two thousand pounds, I think, has by my directions been paid to your credit by Mr. Tombe."

"Well," said Vavasor, taking his right hand away from his waistcoat, and tapping the round table with his fingers impatiently.

"I hardly know how to explain all the circumstances under which this has been done."

"I dare say not; but, nevertheless, you must explain them."

Grey was a man tranquil in temperament, very little prone to quarrelling, with perhaps an exaggerated idea of the evil results of a row,—a man who would take infinite trouble to avoid any such scene as that which now seemed to be imminent; but he was a man whose courage was quite as high as that of his opponent. To bully or to be bullied was alike contrary to his nature. It was clear enough now that Vavasor intended to bully him, and he made up his mind at once that if the quarrel were forced upon him it should find him ready to take his own part. "My difficulty in explaining it comes from consideration for you," he said.

"Then I beg that your difficulty will cease, and that you will have no consideration for me. We are so circumstanced towards each other that any consideration must be humbug and nonsense. At any rate, I intend to have none for you. Now, let me know why you have meddled with my matters."

"I think I might, perhaps, better refer you to your uncle."

"No, sir; Mr. Tombe is not my uncle's lawyer. My uncle never heard his name, unless he heard of it from you."

"But it was by agreement with your uncle that I com-

missioned Mr. Tombe to raise for you the money you were desirous of borrowing from your cousin. We thought it better that her fortune should not be for the moment disturbed."

"But what had you to do with it? Why should you have done it? In the first place, I don't believe your story; it is altogether improbable. But why should he come to you of all men to raise money on his daughter's behalf?"

"Unless you can behave yourself with more discretion, Mr. Vavasor, you must leave the room," said Mr. Grey. Then, as Vavasor simply sneered at him, but spoke nothing, he went on. "It was I who suggested to your uncle that this arrangement should be made. I did not wish to see Miss Vavasor's fortune squandered."

"And what was her fortune to you, sir? Are you aware that she is engaged to me as my wife? I ask you, sir, whether you are aware that Miss Vavasor is to be my wife?"

"I must altogether decline to discuss with you Miss Vavasor's present or future position."

"By heavens, then, you shall hear me discuss it! She was engaged to you, and she has given you your dismissal. If you had understood anything of the conduct which is usual among gentlemen, or if you had had any particle of pride in you, sir, you would have left her and never mentioned her name again. I now find you meddling with her money matters, so as to get a hold upon her fortune."

"I have no hold upon her fortune."

"Yes, sir, you have. You do not advance two thousand pounds without knowing that you have

security. She has rejected you; and in order that you may be revenged, or that you may have some further hold upon her,—that she may be in some sort within your power, you have contrived this rascally pettifogging way of obtaining power over her income. The money shall be repaid at once, with any interest that can be due; and if I find you interfering again, I will expose you."

"Mr. Vavasor," said Grey very slowly, in a low tone of voice, but with something in his eye which would have told any bystander that he was much in earnest, "you have used words in your anger which I cannot allow to pass. You must recall them."

"What were the words? I said that you were a pettifogging rascal. I now repeat them." As he spoke he put on his hat, so as to leave both his hands ready for action if action should be required.

Grey was much the larger man and much the stronger. It may be doubted whether he knew himself the extent of his own strength, but such as it was he resolved that he must now use it. "There is no help for it," he said, as he also prepared for action. The first thing he did was to open the door, and as he did so he became conscious that his mouth was full of blood from a sharp blow upon his face. Vavasor had struck him with his fist, and had cut his lip against his teeth. Then there came a scramble, and Grey was soon aware that he had his opponent in his hands. I doubt whether he had attempted to strike a blow, or whether he had so much as clenched his fist. Vavasor had struck him repeatedly, but the blows had fallen on his body or his head, and he was unconscious of them. He had but one object now in his mind, and that object

was the kicking his assailant down the stairs. Then came a scramble, as I have said, and Grey had a hold of the smaller man by the nape of his neck. So holding him he forced him back through the door on to the landing, and there succeeded in pushing him down the first flight of steps. Grey kicked at him as he went, but the kick was impotent. He had, however, been so far successful that he had thrust his enemy out of the room, and had the satisfaction of seeing him sprawling on the landing-place.

Vavasor, when he raised himself, prepared to make another rush at the room, but before he could do so a man from below, hearing the noise, had come upon him and interrupted him. "Mr. Jones," said Grey, speaking from above, "if that gentleman does not leave the house, I must get you to search for a policeman."

Vavasor, though the lodging-house man had hold of the collar of his coat, made no attempt to turn upon his new enemy. When two dogs are fighting, any bystander may attempt to separate them with impunity. The brutes are so anxious to tear each other that they have no energies left for other purposes. It never occurs to them to turn their teeth upon the new comers in the quarrel. So it was with George Vavasor. Jones was sufficient to prevent his further attack upon the foe upstairs, and therefore he had no alternative but to relinquish the fight.

"What 's it all about, sir?" said Jones, who kept a tailor's establishment, and, as a tailor, was something of a fighting man himself. Of all tradesmen in London the tailors are, no doubt, the most combative,—as might be expected from the necessity which lies upon

them of living down the general bad character in this respect which the world has wrongly given them. "What 's it all about, sir?" said Jones, still holding Vavasor by his coat.

"That man has ill-used me, and I 've punished him; that 's all."

"I don't know much about punishing," said the tailor. "It seems to me he pitched you down pretty clean out of the room above. I think the best thing you can do now is to walk yourself off."

It was the only thing that Vavasor could do, and he did walk himself off. He walked himself off, and went home to his own lodgings in Cecil Street, that he might smooth his feathers after the late encounter before he went down to Westminster to take his seat in the House of Commons. I do not think that he was comfortable when he got there, or that he felt himself very well able to fight another battle that night on behalf of the River Bank. He had not been hurt, but he had been worsted. Grey had probably received more personal damage than had fallen to his share; but Grey had succeeded in expelling him from the room, and he knew that he had been found prostrate on the landing-place when the tailor first saw him.

But he might probably have got over the annoyance of this feeling had he not been overwhelmed by a consciousness that everything was going badly with him. He was already beginning to hate his seat in Parliament. What good had it done for him, or was it likely to do for him? He found himself to be associated there with Mr. Bott, and a few others of the same class,—men whom he despised; and even they did not admit him among them without a certain show of

superiority on their part. Who has not ascertained by his own experience the different lights through which the same events may be seen, according to the success, or want of success, which pervades the atmosphere at the moment? At the present time everything was unsuccessful with George Vavasor; and though he told himself, almost from hour to hour, that he would go on with the thing which he had begun,—that he would persevere in Parliament till he had obtained a hearing there and created for himself success, he could not himself believe in the promises which he had made to himself. He had looked forward to his entrance into that chamber as the hour of his triumph; but he had entered it with Mr. Bott, and there had been no triumph to him in doing so. He had sworn to himself that when there he would find men to hear him. Hitherto, indeed, he could not accuse himself of having missed his opportunities; his election had been so recent that he could hardly yet have made the attempt. But he had been there long enough to learn to fancy that there was no glory in attempting. This art of speaking in Parliament, which had appeared to him to be so grand, seemed already to be a humdrum, homely, dull affair. No one seemed to listen much to what was said. To such as himself,—members without an acquired name,—men did not seem to listen at all. Mr. Palliser had once, in his hearing, spoken for two hours together, and all the House had treated his speech with respect,—had declared that it was useful, solid, conscientious, and what not; but more than half the House had been asleep more than half the time that he was on his legs. Vavasor had not as yet commenced his career as an orator; but

night after night, as he sat there, the chance of commencing it with brilliance seemed to be further from him, and still further. Two thousand pounds of his own money, and two thousand more of Alice's money,—or of Mr. Grey's,—he had already spent to make his way into that assembly. He must spend, at any rate, two thousand more if he intended that his career should be prolonged beyond a three months' sitting;—and how was he to get this further sum after what had taken place to-day?

He would get it. That was his resolve as he walked in by the apple-woman's stall, under the shadow of the great policeman, and between the two august lamps. He would get it;—as long as Alice had a pound over which he could obtain mastery by any act or violence within his compass. He would get it; even though it should come through the hands of John Grey and Mr. Tombe. He would get it; though in doing so he might destroy his cousin Alice and ruin his sister Kate. He had gone too far to stick at any scruples. Had he not often declared how great had been that murderer who had been able to divest himself of all such scruples,—who had scoured his bosom free from all fears of the hereafter, and, as regarded the present, had dared to trust for everything to success? He would go to Alice and demand the money from her with threats, and with that violence in his eyes which he knew so well how to assume. He believed that when he so demanded it, the money would be forthcoming so as to satisfy, at any rate, his present emergencies.

That wretched old man in Westmoreland! If he would but die, there might yet be a hope remaining of permanent success! Even though the estate might be

entailed so as to give him no more than a life-interest, still money might be raised on it. His life-interest in it would be worth ten or twelve years' purchase. He had an idea that his grandfather had not as yet made any such will when he left the place in Westmoreland. What a boon it would be if death could be made to overtake the old man before he did so! On this very night he walked about the lobbies of the House, thinking of all this. He went by himself from room to room, roaming along passages, sitting now for ten minutes in the gallery, and then again for a short space in the body of the House,—till he would get up and wander again out into the lobby, impatient of the neighbourhood of Mr. Bott. Certainly just at this time he felt no desire to bring before the House the subject of the River Embankment.

Nor was Mr. Grey much happier when he was left alone, than was his assailant. To give Vavasor his due, the memory of the affray itself did not long trouble him much. The success between the combatants had been nearly equal, and he had, at any rate, spoken his mind freely. His misery had come from other sources. But the reflection that he had been concerned in a row was in itself enough to make John Grey wretched for the time. Such a misfortune had never hitherto befallen him. In all his dealings with men words had been sufficient, and generally words of courtesy had sufficed. To have been personally engaged in a fighting scramble with such a man as George Vavasor was to him terrible. When ordering that his money might be expended with the possible object of saving Alice from her cousin, he had never felt a moment's regret; he had never thought that he was doing more than

circumstances fairly demanded of him. But now he was almost driven to utter a reproach. "Oh, Alice! Alice! that this thing should have come upon me through thy fault!"

When Vavasor was led away downstairs by the tailor, and Grey found that no more actual fighting would be required of him, he retired into his bedroom, that he might wash his mouth and free himself from the stains of the combat. He had heard the front door closed, and knew that the miscreant was gone,—the miscreant who had disturbed his quiet. Then he began to think what was the accusation with which Vavasor had charged him. He had been told that he had advanced money on behalf of Alice, in order that he might obtain some power over Alice's fortune, and thus revenge himself upon Alice for her treatment of him. Nothing could be more damnably false than this accusation. Of that he was well aware. But were not the circumstances of a nature to make it appear that the accusation was true? Security for the money advanced by him, of course, he had none;—of course he had desired none;—of course the money had been given out of his own pocket with the sole object of saving Alice, if that might be possible; but of all those who might hear of this affair, how many would know or even guess the truth?

While he was in this wretched state of mind, washing his mouth, and disturbing his spirit, Mr. Jones, his landlord, came up to him. Mr. Jones had known him for some years, and entertained a most profound respect for his character. A rather sporting man than otherwise was Mr. Jones. His father had been a tradesman at Cambridge, and in this way Jones had

become known to Mr. Grey. But though given to sport, by which he meant modern prize-fighting and the Epsom course on the Derby day, Mr. Jones was a man who dearly loved respectable customers and respectable lodgers. Mr. Grey with his property at Nethercoats, and his august manners, and his reputation at Cambridge, was a most respectable lodger, and Mr. Jones could hardly understand how any one could presume to raise his hand against such a man.

"Dear, dear, sir,—this is a terrible affair!" he said, as he made his way into the room.

"It was very disagreeable, certainly," said Grey.

"Was the gentleman known to you?" asked the tailor.

"Yes; I know who he is."

"Any quarrel, sir?"

"Well, yes. I should not have pushed him downstairs had he not quarrelled with me."

"We can have the police after him if you wish it, sir?"

"I don't wish it at all."

"Or we might manage to polish him off in any other way, you know."

It was some time before Mr. Grey could get rid of the tailor, but he did so at last without having told any part of the story to that warlike, worthy, and very anxious individual.

END OF VOL. II.

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